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THE STAR KING by JACK VANCE

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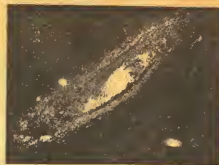
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SCIENCE - SACRED & PROFANE

During the recent unpleasantness, at places like Belsen and Buchenwald, a number of medical men on the payroll of the S.S. were given an unparalleled opportunity to engage in research on human beings.

In most civilized countries—which Germany at that time was not—experimentation on human subjects is governed by strict laws and by perhaps even stricter medical rules. It is not allowed to shorten the life of a subject. It is not even allowed to cause him very much pain, or to maim him in some distinctive way.

In a sense this is a pity. There is a great deal about the human body which is as yet poorly understood, and a lot of it could be cleared up pretty quickly if it were not for these fusspot

rules. If you want quick, sure, definite answers, you want subjects without rights, for you want them to endure whatever fate you decree.

These subjects the German doctors had in abundance, but what they did with them produced no harvest of definite answers. They spared their victims nothing. They strapped together the knees of parturient women until they died in agony; they experimented with cures for frostbite by dipping men in tanks of icy brine, then sandwiching them between nude women; they plucked out hearts like an Inca priest, and timed the convulsions of their victims. What they did, in short, may have been witchcraft, but it was not science and it was not medicine. Surely there



Secrets
entrusted
to a
few

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were scientific questions that they could have answered. At that time, for example, from 1939 to 1945, the earliest stages of the human embryo were known only by conjecture and analogy, for no human eye had seen a foetus in its earliest "horizons" until 1942—and it was not a German scientist that obtained the first such specimen then. The work was done in Boston—without either torture or killing.

If the Herr Doktors had systematically murdered pregnant female prisoners of the concentration camps and searched their ovaries for laboratory specimens—the rest of the world would have hated the act, to be sure, but it is likely that one of the most sought-after treasures in Germany after the collapse that ended World War II would have been these same specimens. For they were literally irreplaceable—are dreadfully scarce even now, and indispensable to the study of embryology.

But they didn't. With no restrictive laws to stop them, with subjects in endless supply—they achieved nothing.

The question is, why? Why not anything of value from all that pain and death?

We start with the assumption that knowledge is a thing worth acquiring, which is to say

that it is worth paying a price for. Human beings have just so many coins in which to pay for what they want—money is one; but so is time, or danger, or suffering. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with spending suffering to buy knowledge. Many a medical volunteer has given up his life in agony, and the state of the art has been enriched thereby.

It is that key word, "volunteer," which makes the difference.

Knowledge does not exist in a vacuum; there can't be any knowledge unless there is someone to know it. It was not a falling apple which produced the law of gravitation, but Newton's mind. Can a computer rattle off a list of primes, ten thousand times faster than a man? Yes, but the computer does not "know" what it has done.

Knowledge can be described as something possessed by human beings.

It is at least a thesis worth debating that inhuman practices cannot produce useful knowledge for human beings. Suffering, voluntarily accepted by the subjects can produce results; the same suffering, inflicted on helpless victims, cannot.

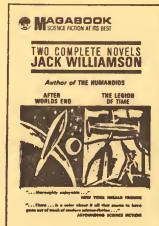
Or if it can . . . why hasn't it, ever?

—THE EDITOR

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THE STAR KING

By JACK
VANCE

Illustrated by ESMH

*On Smade's Planet, the only
law was the will of the man
who owned it—and Gersen had
to become an outlaw!*

FIRST OF TWO PARTS



What a paradox, what a fearful reproach, when the distinction of a few hundred miles—nay, as many feet or even inches!—can transform heinous crime to simple unqualified circumstance!”

—Hm. Balder Bashin, in the Ecclesiarchic Nunciamento of Year 100 at Foresse, on the planet Krokinole.

“Law cannot reach where enforcement will not follow.”

— Popular aphorism.

Excerpts from *Smade of Smade's Planet*, feature article in *Cosmopolia*, October, 1523.

Q: Do you ever get lonesome, Mr. Smade?

A: Not with three wives and eleven children.

Q: Whatever impelled you to settle here? A rather dismal world, on the whole, isn't it?

A: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I don't care to run a vacation resort.

Q: What kind of people patronize the tavern?

A: People who want quiet and a chance to rest. Occasionally a traveler from inside the Pale or an explorer.

Q: I've heard that some of

your clientele is pretty rough. In fact—not to mince matters—it's the general belief that Smade's Tavern is frequented by the most notorious pirates and freebooters of the Beyond.

A: I suppose they occasionally need rest too.

Q: Don't you have difficulty with these people? Maintaining order, so to speak?

A: No. They know my rules. I say, 'Gentlemen, please desist. Your differences are your own; they are fugitive. The harmonious atmosphere of the tavern is mine and I intend it to be permanent.'

Q: So then they desist?

A: Usually.

Q: And if not?

A: I pitch them into the sea.

Smade was a reticent man. His origins and early life were known only to himself. In the year 1479 he acquired a cargo of fine timber, which, for a whole set of obscure reasons, he took to a small stony world in the middle Beyond. And there, with the help of ten indentured artisans and as many slaves, he built Smade's Tavern.

The site was a long narrow

shelf of heath between the Smade Mountains and Smade Ocean, precisely on the planet's equator. He built to a plan as old as construction itself, using stone for the walls, timber beams and plates of schist for the roof. Completed, the tavern clung to the landscape, as integral as an outcrop of rock: a long two-storied structure with a high gable, a double row of windows to front and rear, chimneys at either end venting smoke from fires of fossil moss. At the rear stood a group of cypress trees, their shape completely appropriate to the landscape.

Smade introduced other new features into the ecology. In a sheltered valley behind the tavern he planted fodder and garden truck. In another he kept a small herd of cattle and a flock of poultry. All did moderately well, but showed no disposition to overrun the planet.

Smade's dominion extended as far as he cared to claim—there was no other habitation on the planet—but he chose to assert control only over an area of perhaps three acres, within the bounds of a whitewashed stone fence. To occurrences beyond the fence Smade held aloof, unless he had reason to consider his own interests threatened: a contingency which had never arisen.

Smade's Planet was the single companion of Smade's Star, an undistinguished white dwarf in a relatively empty region of space. The native flora was sparse: lichen, moss, primitive vines and palodendron, pelagic algae which tintured the sea black. The fauna was even simpler: white worms in the sea-bottom muck; a few gelatinous creatures which gathered and ingested the black algae in a ludicrously inept fashion; an assortment of simple protozoa. Smade's alterations of the planet's ecology could hardly, therefore, be considered detrimental.

Smade himself was tall, broad and stout, with bone-white skin and jet-black hair. His antecedents, as has been mentioned, were vague, and he never had been heard to reminisce. The tavern, however, was managed with the utmost decorum. The three wives lived in harmony, the children were handsome and well-mannered, Smade himself was unfailingly polite. His rates were high, but his hospitality was generous, and he made no difficulties about collecting his bill. A sign hung above the bar: "Eat and drink without stint. He who can and does pay is a customer. He who cannot and does not pay is a guest of the establishment."

Smade's patrons were diverse:

explorers, locaters, Jarnell technicians, private agents in search of lost men or stolen treasure, more rarely an IPCC representative, or "weasel", in the argot of the Beyond. Others were folk more dire, and these were of as many sorts as there were crimes to be named. Making a virtue of necessity, Smade presented the same face to all.

To Smade's Tavern in the July of 1524 came Kirth Gersen, representing himself as a locator. His boat was the standard model leased by the estate houses within the Oikumene, a thirty-foot cylinder equipped with no more than bare necessities: in the bow the monitor-autopilot duplex, a star finder, chronometer, macroscope and manual controls; midships the living quarters with air machine, organic reconverter, information bank and storage; aft the energy block, the Jarnell intersplit and further storage. The boat was as scarred and dented as any. Gersen's personal disguise was no more than well-worn clothes and natural taciturnity. Smade accepted him at his own terms. "Will you stay awhile, Mr. Gersen?"

"Two or three days, perhaps. I have things to think over."

Smade nodded in profound understanding. "We're slack just

now; just you and the Star King. You'll find all the quiet you need."

"I'll be pleased for that," said Gersen, which was quite true; his just-completed affairs had left him with a set of unresolved qualms. He turned away, then halted and looked back as Smade's words penetrated his consciousness. "There's a Star King here at the tavern?"

"He has presented himself so."
"I've never seen a Star King. Not that I know of."

Smade nodded politely to indicate that the gossip had reached to the allowable limits of particularity. He indicated the tavern clock: "Our local time better set your watch. Supper at seven o'clock: just half an hour."

Gersen climbed stone stairs to his room, an austere cubicle containing bed, chair and table. He looked through the window, along the verge of heath between mountain and ocean. Two spacecraft occupied the landing field. His own and another ship, larger and heavier, evidently the property of the Star King.

Gersen washed in a hall bathroom, returned to the downstairs hall, where he dined on the produce of Smade's own gardens and herd. Two other guests made their appearance. The first was the Star King, who strode

to the far end of the room in a flutter of rich garments: an individual with skin dyed jet-black, eyes like ebony cabochons as black as his skin. He was taller than average height, and carried himself with consummate arrogance. Lusterless as charcoal, the skin-dye blurred the contrast of his features, made his face a protean mask. His garments were dramatically fanciful: breeches of orange silk, a loose scarlet robe with white sash, a loose striped gray and black coif which hung rakishly down the right side of his head. Gersen inspected him with open curiosity. This was the first Star King he had observed as such, though popular belief had hundreds moving incognito through the worlds of man: cosmic mysteries since the first human visit to Lambda Grus.

The second of the guests apparently had just arrived: a thin middle-aged man of indefinite racial background. Gersen had seen many like him: miscellaneous uncategorized vagabonds of the Beyond. He had short coarse white hair, a sallow undyed skin, an air of diffident uncertainty. He ate without appetite, looking back and forth between Gersen and the Star King in furtive speculation, but presently his most searching glances were directed toward Gersen.

After dinner, as Gersen sat watching the play of lighting over the ocean, the man sidled close, wincing and grimacing in sheer nervousness. He spoke in a voice which he tried to keep even, but which trembled nevertheless. "I assume that you are here from Brinktown?"

Gersen, with his own tensions, alarms and concerns, paused before replying, then gave a mild assent. "As a matter of fact, I am."

"I expected to see someone else. But no matter. I've decided that I can't fulfill my obligation. Your journey is pointless. That's all." He stood back, teeth showing in a humorless grin. He was obviously braced against an expected dire reaction.

"You mistake me for someone else," said Gersen.

The other peered down in disbelief. "But you are here from Brinktown?"

"What of that?"

The other made a forlorn gesture. "No matter. I expected — but no matter." After a moment he said, "I noticed your ship. Model 9B. You're a locator, then."

"Correct."

"You're on your way out? Or in?"

"I've been out. I can't say that I've had luck."

The other man's tension sud-

denly gave way. His shoulders sagged. "I own to the same line of business. As to luck?" He heaved a forlorn sigh, and Gersen smelled Smade's home-distilled whiskey. "If it's bad, no doubt I have myself to blame."

Gersen's suspicion was not completely lulled. The man's voice was well-modulated, his accent educated. In itself it indicated nothing. He might be precisely as he represented himself, a locator in some sort of trouble at Brinktown. Or he might be otherwise—a situation entailing a set of hair-raising corollaries. Gersen would have preferred the company of his own thoughts, but he made a courteous gesture. "Do you care to join me?"

"Thank you." The man seated himself gratefully, and with a new air of bravado seemed to dismiss all of his worries and apprehensions. "My name is Lugo Teehalt. Will you drink?" Without waiting for assent he signaled one of Smade's young daughters, a girl of nine or ten, wearing a modest white blouse and long black skirt. "I'll use whiskey, lass, and serve this gentleman whatever he decides for himself."

Teehalt appeared to derive strength either from the drink, or from the prospect of conversation. His voice became firmer,

his eyes clearer and brighter. "How long have you been out?"

"Four or five months," said Gersen, in his role of locator. "I've seen nothing but rock and mud and sulfur. I don't know whether it's worth the trouble."

Teehalt smiled, nodded slowly. "But still—there's always excitement. The star gleams, you notice a cirlet of planets, you ask yourself, will it be now? And, time after time, the smoke and ammonia, the weird crystals, the winds of monoxide, the rains of acid. But you go on and on. Perhaps out in that region ahead the elements coalesce into nobler forms. Of course it's the same slime and methane snow. And then, suddenly, there it is. Utter beauty . . ."

Gersen sipped his whiskey without comment. Teehalt apparently was a gentleman, well-mannered and educated, sadly come down in the world.

Teehalt continued, half-talking to himself. "Where the luck lies, that I don't know. I'm sure of nothing—now."

Gersen laughed sourly. "Uncertainty hurts more than ignorance."

Teehalt inspected him quizzically. "You can't believe that a man is the better for ignorance?"

"Cases vary. But it's clear that uncertainty breeds indecision

which is a dead halt. An ignorant man can act. As to right and wrong—each man to his own answer."

Teehalt smiled sadly. "You espouse a very popular doctrine, ethical pragmatism, which always turns out to be the doctrine of self-interest. Still, I understand you when you speak of uncertainty, for I am an uncertain man." He shook his thin sharp-featured head. "I know I'm in a bad way, but I've had a peculiar experience." He finished the whiskey, leaned forward to gaze into Gersen's face. "You are perhaps more sensitive than first impression would suggest. And possibly younger than you seem."

"I was born in 1490."

Teehalt made a sign which could mean anything, searched Gersen's face once more. "Can you understand me if I say that I have known over-much beauty?"

"I probably could understand," said Gersen, "if you made yourself clear."

Teehalt blinked thoughtfully. "I will try." He considered. "As I have admitted to you, I am a locator. It is a poor trade—with apologies to you—for eventually it involves the degradation of beauty. Sometimes only to a small extent, which is what a person such as myself hopes for. Sometimes there is only small

beauty to corrupt and sometimes the beauty is incorruptible." He gave his hand a wave toward the ocean. "The tavern harms nothing. The tavern allows the beauty of this terrible little planet to make itself known." He leaned forward, licked his lips. "You must know of Grendel?"

Gersen controlled his expression. "Grendel the Monster, so-called? I know his reputation."

"Whatever you may have heard, I assure you, it is flattery."

"You don't know what I have heard."

"I doubt if you have heard the worst. But nevertheless, and the astounding paradox . . ." Teehalt closed his eyes. "I am locating for Grendel. He owns my ship. I have taken his money."

"It is a difficult position." "When I found out—what could I do?" Teehalt threw up his hands in an excited extravagant gesture, reflecting either emotional turmoil or the effects of Smade's whiskey. "I asked myself this over and over. For I had my ship and my money, not from an estate house, but from an institution of far greater dignity. I did not think of myself as a common locator. The idea was demeaning. I was Lugo Teehalt, a man of parts, who

had been appointed to the post of Chief Explorer for the institution, or some such folly—so I assured myself. But they sent me out in a 9B boat, and I could no longer delude myself. I was Lugo Teehalt, common locator."

"Where is your boat?" asked Gersen, idly curious. "There is only my own and the Star King's out on the landing-field."

Teehalt pursed his lips, in another onset of wariness. "I have good reason for caution." Teehalt glanced right and left. "Would it surprise you to learn that I expect to meet—"

He hesitated, thought better of what he planned to say, and sat silently a moment, looking into his empty glass. Gersen signaled, and young Araminta Smade brought whiskey, on a white jade tray, upon which she herself had painted a red and blue floral border.

"But this is inconsequential," said Teehalt suddenly. "I bore you with my problems."

"Not at all," said Gersen, quite truthfully. "The affairs of Grendel interest me."

"I can understand this," said Teehalt after another pause. "He is a peculiar combination of qualities."

"From whom did you have your boat?" Gersen asked ingenuously.

Teehalt shook his head. "I will not say. For all I know, you are Grendel's man. I hope not, for your own sake."

"Why should I be Grendel's man?"

"Circumstances suggest as much. But circumstances only. And in fact I know that you are not. He would not send someone here whom I have not met."

"You have a rendezvous, then."

"One I don't care to keep. But—I don't know what else to do."

"Return to the Oikumene."

"What does Grendel care for that? He comes and goes as he pleases."

"Why should he concern himself with you? Locaters are twenty to the dozen."

"I am unique," said Teehalt. "I am a locator who has found a prize too precious to sell."

Gersen was impressed in spite of himself.

"It is a world too beautiful for degradation," said Teehalt. "An innocent world, full of light and air and color. To give this world to Grendel, for his palaces and whirligigs and casinos—it would be like giving a child to a squad of Sarcoy soldiers. Worse? Possibly worse."

"And Grendel knows of this?"

"It is my unfortunate habit to drink rashly and talk wildly."

"As you do now," suggested Gersen.

Teehalt smiled his wincing morose smile. "You could tell Grendel nothing he does not already know. The damage was done at Brinktown."

"Tell me more of this world. Is it inhabited?"

Teehalt smiled again, but made no answer. Gersen felt no resentment. Teehalt, beckoning to Araminta Smade, ordered Frazee, a heavy sour-sweet liquor reputed to include among its constituents a subtle hallucinizer. Gersen signified that he would drink no more.

Night had long settled over the planet. Lightning crashed back and forth. A sudden downpour began to drum on the roof.

Teehalt, lulled by the liquor, perhaps seeing visions among the flames, said, "You could never find this world. I am resolved that it shall not be violated."

"What of your contract?"

Teehalt made a contemptuous motion: "I would honor it for an ordinary world."

"The information is on the monitor filament," Gersen pointed out. "The property of your sponsor."

Teehalt was silent so long that Gersen wondered if he were awake. Finally Teehalt said, "I am afraid to die. Otherwise I

would drop myself and boat and monitor and all into a star."

Gersen had no comment to make.

"I do not know what to do." Teehalt's voice became soft, as the drink soothed his brain and showed him visions. "This is a remarkable world. Beautiful, yes. I wonder if the beauty does not conceal another quality which I can't fathom, just as a woman's beauty camouflages her more abstract virtues. Or vices... In any event the world is beautiful and serene beyond words. There are mountains washed by rain. Over the valleys float clouds as soft and bright as snow. The sky is a deep dark sapphire blue. The air is sweet and cool—so fresh that it seems a lens. There are flowers, though not very many. They grow in little clumps, so that to find them is like coming on a treasure. But there are many trees, and most magnificent are the great kings, with gray bark, which seem to have lived forever.

"You asked if the world were inhabited. I am forced to answer yes, though the creatures who live there are strange. I call them dryads. I saw only a few hundred, and they seem a race ages old. As old as the trees. As old as the mountains." Teehalt shut his eyes. "The day is twice

the length of ours; the mornings are long and bright; the noons are quiet, the afternoons are golden, like honey. The dryads bathe in the river or stand in the dark forest. . .” Teehalt’s voice dwindled, he appeared to be half-asleep.

Gersen prompted him. “Dryads?”

Teehalt stirred, raised in his chair. “It’s as good a name as any. They’re at least half-plant. I made no real examination I dared not. Why? I don’t know. I was there — oh, I suppose two or three weeks. This is what I saw. . .”

Teehalt landed the battered old 9B on a meadow beside a river. He waited while the analyzer made environmental tests, though a landscape so fair could not fail to be hospitable — or so thought Teehalt who was scholar, poet and wastrel in equal parts. He was not wrong. The atmosphere proved salubrious; allergen-sensitive cultures tested negative; micro-organisms of air and soil quickly died upon contact with the standard antibiotic with which Teehalt now dosed himself. There seemed no reason why he should not immediately go forth upon this world, and he did so.

On the turf in front of the ship Teehalt stood entranced.

The air was clear and clean and fresh, like the air of a spring dawn, and utterly silent, as if just after a bird-call.

Teehalt wandered up the valley. Stopping to admire a grove of trees, he saw the dryads, who stood gathered in the shade.

They were bipeds, with a peculiarly human torso and head structure, though it was clear that they resembled man in only the most superficial style. Their skin was a silver, brown, green, in sheens and splotches; the head showed no features other than purplish-green bruises, which seemed to be eye-spots. From the shoulders rose members like arms, which branched into twigs and then leaves of dark and pale green, burnished red, bronze-orange, golden ochre. They saw Teehalt and moved forward with almost human interest, to pause about fifty feet distant, swaying on supple limbs, the crests of colored leaves shimmering in the sunlight. They examined Teehalt and he examined them, in a mutual absence of fear, and Teehalt thought them the most entrancing creatures of his experience.

Teehalt remembered the days which followed as idyllic and utterly calm. There was a majesty, a clarity, a transcendental quality to the planet which affected him with an almost re-

ligious awe. Presently he came to understand that he must leave shortly or succumb psychically, give himself completely to the world. The knowledge afflicted him with an almost unbearable sadness, for he knew that he would never return.

During this time he watched the dryads as they moved through the valley, idly curious as to their nature and habits. Were they intelligent? Teehalt never answered the question to his own satisfaction. If not intelligent, he thought, surely they were wise. Their metabolism puzzled him, and also the nature of their life-cycle, though gradually he acquired at least a glimmer of enlightenment. He assumed at first that they derived energy from some sort of photosynthetic process. Then, one morning, as Teehalt contemplated a group of dryads standing immobile in the marshy meadow, a large winged hawk-like creature swooped down, buffeted one of the dryads to the side. As it toppled Teehalt glimpsed two white shafts, or prongs, extending from the supple gray legs into the ground, which at once retracted. The hawk-creature ignored the toppled dryad, but scratched and tore at the marsh and unearthed an enormous white grub. Teehalt watched

with great interest. The dryad apparently had located the grub in its subterranean burrow and had pierced it with a sort of proboscis, presumably for the ingestion of sustenance. Teehalt felt a small pang of shame and disillusionment. The dryads were evidently not quite as innocent and ethereal as he had thought them to be.

The hawk-thing lumbered up from the pit, croaked, coughed, flapped away. Teehalt went curiously forward and stared down at the mangled worm.

There was little to be seen but shreds of pallid flesh, yellow ooze and a hard black ball, the size of Teehalt’s two fists. As he stared down, the dryads came slowly forward and Teehalt withdrew. From a distance he watched as they clustered about the torn worm. It seemed to Teehalt that they mourned the mangled creature. But presently, with their supple lower limbs, they brought up the black pod which one of them carried away high in its branches. Teehalt followed at a distance, and watched in fascinated wonder as close beside a grove of slender white-branched trees the dryads buried the black pod.

In retrospect Teehalt wondered why he had attempted no communication with the

dryads. Once or twice during the time of his stay he toyed with the idea, and let the thought drift away — perhaps because he felt himself a gross and unpleasant intruder. The dryads in their turn treated him with what might be courteous disinterest.

Three days after the black pod had been buried Teehalt had occasion to return to the grove. To his astonishment he saw a pallid shoot rising from the ground above the pod. At the tip pale green leaves already were unfolding into the sunlight.

Teehalt stood back and examined the grove with new interest. Had each of these trees grown from a pod originated in the body of a subterranean grub? He examined the foliage, limbs and bark, finding nothing to suggest such an origin. He looked across the valley, to the great dark-leaved giants. Surely the two varieties were similar? The giants were majestic, serene, with trunks rising two or three hundred feet to the first branching. The trees grown from the black pods were frail. Their foliage was a tenderer green. The limbs were more flexible, and branched close to the ground — but the species were clearly related. Leaf shape and structure were almost identical, as was the general appearance of the bark,

supple and rough-textured, though the bark of the giants was darker and coarser. Teehalt's head swarmed with speculations.

Later the same day he climbed the mountain across the valley. Crossing the ridge he came down upon a glen with precipitous rocky walls.

A stream rushed and splashed through mossy boulders and low fernlike plants, falling from pool to pool. Approaching the brink Teehalt found himself on a level with the foliage of the giant trees, which here grew close beside the cliff. He noted dull green sacs, like fruit, growing among the leaves. Straining, risking a fall, Teehalt was able to pluck one of these sacs. He carried it down the mountain-side and across the meadow toward the boat. He passed a group of dryads who, fixing their purple-green eye-bruises on the sac, became rigid. Teehalt observed them with puzzlement. Now they approached, their gorgeous fans quivering and shimmering in agitation.

Teehalt felt embarrassed and guilty. Evidently by plucking the sac he had offended the dryads. Why or how he could not fathom, but he hastily sought the concealment of his ship, where he cut open the sac. The husk was pithy and dry. Down

the center ran a stalk from which depended white pea-sized seeds, of great complexity. Teehalt inspected the seeds under a magnifier. They bore a remarkable resemblance to small underdeveloped beetles, or wasps. With tweezers and knife he opened one out on a sheet of paper, noting wings, thorax, mandibles. Clearly an insect!

For a long while he sat contemplating the insects which grew on a tree. A curious analogue, so Teehalt reflected, to the sapling which sprouted from a pod taken from the body of a worm.

Sunset colored the sky; the distant parts of the valley grew indistinct. Dusk came and evening, with the stars blurring large as lamps.

The long night passed. At dawn when Teehalt emerged from his boat he knew that the time of his departure was close at hand. How? Why? He had no answer. The compulsion nevertheless was real; he must leave, and he knew he would never return. As he considered the mother-of-pearl sky, the curve and swell of the hills, the groves and forests, the gentle river, his eyes went damp. The world was too beautiful to leave; far too beautiful to remain upon. It worked on something deep inside him, arousing a queer tu-

mult which he could not understand. There was a constant force from somewhere to run from the ship, to discard his clothes, his weapons, to merge, to envelope and become enveloped, to immolate himself in an ecstasy of identification with beauty and grandeur.

Today he must go. "If I'm here any longer," thought Teehalt, "I'll be carrying leaves over my head with the dryads."

He wandered up the valley, turning to watch the sun swell into the sky. He climbed to the ridge of the hill, looked east over a succession of rolling crests and valleys, rising gradually to a single great mountain. To west and south he glimpsed the glimmer of water. To the north spread green parkland, with a crumble of gray boulders like the ruins of an ancient city.

Returning into the valley Teehalt passed below the giant trees. Looking up he noticed that all the pods had split and now hung limp and withered. Even as he watched he heard a drone of wings. A hard heavy pellet struck his cheek, where it clung and bit.

In shock and pain Teehalt crushed the insect, or wasp. Looking aloft he saw others — a multitude, darting and veering. Hastily he returned to the

ship, dressed in a coverall of tough film, his face and head protected by transparent mesh. He was unreasonably angry. The wasp's attack had marred his last day in the valley, and in fact had caused him the first pain of his stay. It was too much to expect, he reflected bitterly, that paradise could exist without the serpent. And he dropped a can of compressed insect repellent into his pouch... though it might or might not be efficacious against these half-vegetable insects.

Leaving the ship, he marched up the valley, with the insect's bite paining him still. Approaching the forest he came upon a strange scene: a group of dryads surrounded by a buzzing swarm of wasps. Teehalt approached curiously. The dryads, he saw, were under attack, but lacked any efficient means of defence. As the wasps darted in to settle on the silver skin, the dryads flapped their branches, rubbed against each other, scraped with their legs, dislodging the insects as best they could.

Teehalt approached, filled with horrified anger. One of the dryads near him seemed to weaken. Several of the insects gnawed through its skin, drawing gouts of ichor. The entire swarm suddenly condensed upon the unfortunate dryad, which

tottered and fell, while the remaining dryads moved sedately away.

Teehalt, impelled to disgust and loathing, stepped forward, turned the can of repellent upon the nearly solid mass of wasps. It acted with dramatic effectiveness, the wasps turning white, withering, dropping to the ground. In a single minute the entire swarm was a scatter of small white husks. The dryad under attack also lay dead, having been almost instantly stripped of its flesh.

The dryads who had escaped were now returning, and so Teehalt thought, in a state of anguish and even fury. Their branches quivered and flashed; they marched down upon him with every indication of antagonism. Teehalt took to his heels and returned to his ship.

With binoculars he watched the dryads. They stood about their dead comrade in a state of anxiety and irresolution. Apparently—or at least it seemed so to Teehalt—their anguish was as much for the withered insects as the dead dryad.

They clustered over the fallen body. Teehalt could not observe exactly what they did, but presently they arose with a glossy black ball. And Teehalt watched them carry it across the valley toward the grove of giant trees.

II

I have examined the native life-forms of over two thousand planets. I have noted many examples of convergent evolution, but many many more of divergence.

— *Life* Volume II,
by Unspeek, Baron Bodissey.

It is first of all essential that we understand exactly what we mean by the well-used term "convergent evolution". Especially we must not confuse statistical probability with some transcendental and utterly compelling force. Consider the class of all possible objects, the number of which is naturally very large: infinite indeed, unless we impose an upper limit of mass and certain other physical qualifications. Thus imposing and so qualifying, we find that still only an infinitesimal fraction of this class of objects can be considered life-forms... Before we have even started the investigation we have exercised a very stringent selection of objects which by their very definition will show basic similarities.

To particularize: there are a limited number of methods of locomotion. If we find a quadruped on Planet A, and a quadruped likewise on Planet B, does this imply convergent evolution?

No. It merely implies evolution, or perhaps no more than the fact that a four-legged creature can effectively stand without toppling and walk without stumbling. In my opinion, therefore, the expression "convergent evolution" is tautological.

— Ibid

From: *The Wages of Sin*, by Stridenko; article in *Cosmopolis*, May, 1404.

Brinktown: what a city! Once the jumping-off place, the last outpost, the portal into infinity—now just another settlement of the North East Middle Beyond. But "just another"? Is this a fair description? Decidedly not. Brinktown must be seen to be believed, and even then the hard of belief depart incredulous. The houses are set far apart along shaded avenues; still they rise like watch-towers, thrusting up into and through the palms, virebols, scalmettos. It is a mean house which does not soar above the treetops. The ground level is no more than an entry, a raised pavilion where the clothes must be changed, for local habit ordains the use of paper house-capes and paper slippers. Then above: what an explosion of architectural conceits, what turrets and spires, belfries and cu-

polas! What jejeune magnificence, what inspired scrimshaw, what intricate, inventive, farcical, wonderful applications and misapplications of likely and unlikely materials! Where else can one find balustrades of tortoise-shell studded with gold-plated fish-heads? Where else do ivory nymphs hang suspended by their hair from the roof gutters, their faces expressing only bland benediction? Where else can a man's success be gauged by the sumptuousness of the tombstone he designs for himself and erects in his front yard, complete with panegyrical epitaph? And in fact where but in Brinktown is success such an ambiguous recommendation? Few indeed of the inhabitants dare show themselves within the Oikumene. The magistrates are assassins; the civil guard arsonists, extortioners and rapists; the elders of the council, bordello owners. But civil affairs proceed with a punctilio and gravity worthy of the Grand Sessions at Borugstone, or a coronation at the Tower of London. The Brinktown jail is one of the most ingenious ever propounded by civic authorities. It must be remembered that Brinktown occupies the surface of a volcanic butte, overlooking a trackless jungle of quagmire, thorn, eel-vine skiver tussock. A single road leads from

city down to jungle. The prisoner is merely locked out of the city. Escape is at his option; he may flee as far through the jungle as he sees fit; the entire continent is at his disposal. But no prisoner ever ventures far from the gate. And when his presence is required it is only necessary to unlock the gate and call his name.

Teehalt sat looking into the fire. Gersen wondered if he intended to say more.

At last Teehalt spoke. "So I left the planet. I could stay no longer. To live there a person must either forget himself, give way completely to the beauty, drown his identity in it — or else he must master it. Break it. Reduce it to a background for his own constructions. I could do neither, so I can never go back. But the memory of the place haunts me."

"In spite of the wasps?"

Teehalt nodded somberly. "Yes indeed. I did wrong to interfere. There is a rhythm to the planet, an equilibrium which I blundered into and disturbed. I've speculated for days, but I still don't understand the process completely. Wasps are born as fruit of the tree; the worms yield the seed to one kind of tree — this much I know. I suspect that the dryads produce the seed to the great giants. The pro-

cess of life becomes a great circle, or perhaps a series of incarnations, with the great trees as the end-result. The dryads seem to tap the worms for part of their sustenance, the wasps devour the dryads. Where do the worms come from? Are the wasps their first phase? Flying larvae, so to speak? Do the worms eventually metamorphose into dryads? I feel this must be the case — though I don't know. If so, the cycle is beautiful, in a fashion I can't find words to describe. Something ordained, stately, ancient, like the rotation of the galaxy. If the pattern were disturbed, if one link were broken, the whole process would collapse. This would be a great crime."

"So therefore you don't want to reveal the location of the world to your sponsor whom you believe to be Grendel the Monster."

"I know to be Grendel," said Teehalt stiffly.

"How did you find out?"

Teehalt looked at him sideways. "You are very interested in Grendel."

Gersen shrugged. "One hears many strange tales."

"True. But I do not care to document them. And do you know why?"

"No."

"I have changed my thoughts

about you. Now I suspect you of weaselry."

"If I were a weasel," said Gersen smiling, "I'd hardly admit it. The IPCC has few friends Beyond."

"I am unconcerned," said Teehalt. "But I hope for better days if — when I return home. I do not care to incur Grendel's animosity by identifying him to a weasel."

"If I were a weasel," said Gersen, "you have already compromised yourself. You know of truth drugs and hypnotic rays."

"Yes. I also know how to avoid them. But no matter. It's not important. You asked how I learned that Grendel was my sponsor. I have no objection to telling you this. Through my own drunken prolixity. I put in to Brinktown. In Sin-San's Tavern I spoke at length, much as I spoke to you tonight, to a dozen enthralled listeners. Yes, I held their attention." Teehalt laughed bitterly. "Presently I was called to the telephone. The man at the other end said his name was Hildemar Dasce. Do you know him?"

"No."

"Odd," said Teehalt, "since you are so interested in Grendel. But, in any event, he spoke to me, told me to report to Smade's. He said I'd meet Grendel here."

"What?" demanded Gersen. "Here?"

"Here at Smade's. I asked, what's this to me? I had no dealings with Grendel and wished none. He convinced me otherwise. So I'm here. I am not a brave man." He made a small helpless gesture, picked up his empty glass, looked into it. "I don't know what to do. If I remain Beyond..." Teehalt shrugged.

"Destroy the monitor filament."

Teehalt shook his head regretfully. "It's the surety I carry for my life. Indeed I'd rather—he stopped short. "Did you hear anything?"

"Rain. Thunder."

"I thought I heard tubes blowing." He rose to his feet, peered from the window. "Some is coming."

Gersen also went to the window. "I see nothing."

"A ship dropped down into the field," said Teehalt. He thought a moment. "There are only two ships there: yours and the Star King's."

"Where is your ship?"

"I set down in a valley to the north. I want no one meddling with my monitor." He seemed to listen, then looking into Gersen's eyes he said, "You are not a locator."

"No."

Teehalt nodded. "Locaters are, by and large, a vile lot. You are not of the IPCC?"

"Think of me as an explorer."

"Will you help me?"

The harsh precepts of Gersen's training contended with an innate generosity; he muttered reluctantly, "Within limits—very narrow limits."

Teehalt smiled thinly. "What are these limits?"

"My own business is urgent. I can't allow myself to be diverted."

Teehalt was neither disappointed nor resentful. He could expect no more from a stranger. "Odd," he said once more, "that you do not know Hildemar Dasce. But he will come in presently. How do I know? By the logic of plain ordinary fear."

"You'll be safe so long as you stay inside the tavern," said Gersen. "Smade has his rules."

Teehalt nodded, politely acknowledging the discomfiture he had caused Gersen. A minute passed. The Star King rose to his feet, his pink and red garment glowed in the firelight. He walked slowly up the stairs, looking neither right nor left.

Teehalt followed him with his eyes. "Impressive creature... I understand that only the handsome ones are allowed to leave their planet."

"So I have heard."

Teehalt sat looking into the fire.

Five minutes passed. Then Teehalt reached into his jacket, brought forth an envelope. "Here are photographs you might be pleased to inspect at your leisure."

Gersen took them without comment.

The door slid back. Three dark shapes stood in the gap, looking into the room. Smade roared from behind the bar, "Come in or stay out! Must I warm the whole cursed planet?"

Into the hall stepped the strangest human being of Gersen's experience. "And there," said Teehalt with a sick titter, "you see Beauty Dasce."

Dasce was about six feet tall. His torso was a tube, the same gauge from knee to shoulder. His arms were thin and long, terminating in great bony wrists, enormous hands. His head was also tall and round, with a ruff of red hair and a chin seeming almost to rest on the clavicle. Dasce had stained his neck and face bright red, excepting only his cheeks, which were balls of bright chalk-blue, like a pair of mildewed oranges. At some stage of his career his nose had been cleft into a pair of cartilaginous prongs, and his eyelids had been cut away; to moisten his corneas

he wore two nozzles connected to a tank of fluid which every few seconds discharged a film of mist into his eyes. There was also a pair of shutters, now raised, which could be lowered to cover his eyes from the light, and which were painted to represent staring white and blue eyes similar to Dasce's own.

The two men at his back by contrast appeared ordinary run-of-the-mill human beings: both dark, hard, competent-seeming, with quick clever eyes.

Dasce made a brusque signal to Smade, who stood impassively watching from behind the bar. "Three rooms, if you please. We will eat presently."

"Very well."

"The name is Hildemar Dasce."

"Very well, Mr. Dasce."

Dasce now sauntered across the room to where Teehalt and Gersen sat. His glance shifted from one to the other. "Since we are fellow travelers, house-guests of Mr. Smade, let us introduce ourselves," he said politely. "My name is Hildemar Dasce. May I inquire yours?"

"I am Kirth Gersen."

"I am Keelen Tannas."

Dasce's lips, pale purple-gray against the red of his skin, moved in a smile. "To an amazing degree you resemble a cer-

tain Lugo Teehalt whom I expected to find here."

"Think of me as you like," said Teehalt in a reedy voice. "I have spoken my name."

"But what a pity. I have business to transact with Lugo Teehalt!"

"It is pointless then to approach me."

"As you wish. Though I suspect that the business with Lugo Teehalt might interest Keelen Tannas. Will you step aside for a moment's private conversation?"

"No. I am not interested. My friend knows my name. It is Keelen Tannas."

"Your 'friend'?" Dasce turned his attention to Gersen. "Do you know this man well?"

"As well as I know anyone."

"And his name is Keelen Tannas?"

"If this is the name he offers you, I can only suggest that you accept it!"

Without further remark Dasce turned away. He and his men went to a table at the end of the hall, where they ate.

Teehalt spoke in a hollow voice, "He knows me well enough."

Gersen felt a spasm of irritation. Why should Teehalt feel impelled to embroil a stranger in his troubles, if his identity were already known?

Teehalt explained his act in the next breath. "Since I fight the hook, he thinks he has me trapped, and he amuses himself."

"What of Grendel? I thought you had come here to meet him."

"Better that I return to Alphanor and confront him there. I will return his money, but I will not lead him to the planet."

At the far end of the hall Dasce and his two companions were served with platters from Smade's kitchen. Gersen watched them a moment. "They seem unconcerned."

Teehalt sniffed. "They think that I will deal with Grendel, but not with them... I will try to escape. Dasce does not know that I landed over the hill. Perhaps he thinks that your ship is mine."

"Who are the other two men?"

"Assassins. They know me well enough, from the tavern at Brinktown. Tristano is an Earthman. He kills by touches of his hand. The other is a Sarkoy venefice. He can brew stuff to kill from sand and water. All three are madmen—but Dasce is the worst. He knows every horror there is to be known."

Dasce at this moment looked at his watch. Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand he rose, crossed the room, bent over Teehalt. In a husky whis-

per he said, "Grendel waits you outside. He will see you now."

Teehalt stared at him with sagging jaw. Dasce swaggered back to his table.

Now Teehalt rubbed his face with quivering fingers, turned to Gersen. "I can still evade them if I can lose myself in the dusk. When I run out the door, will you detain the three?"

"How do you suggest I do this?"

Teehalt was silent a moment. "I don't know."

"Nor do I, with the best will in the world."

Teehalt gave a sad nod. "Very well, then. I will fend for myself. Good-by, Mr. Gersen." He rose to his feet, walked to the bar. Dasce slanted his eyes at him, but otherwise seemed disinterested. Beside the bar, Teehalt stood beyond the reach of his vision. Instantly Teehalt darted into the kitchen, out of sight. Smade looked after him with sardonic wonder.

Dasce and the two assassins stolidly continued their meal.

Gersen watched covertly. Why did they sit with such unconcern? Teehalt's ruse had been pitifully obvious. Gersen's skin began to prickle. In spite of his resolve, he rose to his feet, went to the doorway. Pushing open the timber panels, he stepped out on the veranda.

The night was dark, lit only by stars. The wind, for a wonder, was still; but the sea, swirling and flowing, sent up a muffled sad sound... A short sharp scream, a whimper, from behind the tavern. Gersen abandoned his resolve and started forward. A grip like the pinch of steel seized his arm, tweaked nerves at the back of his elbow; another hand clamped at his neck. Gersen let himself fall, broke the grip. He rolled over, bounced to his feet, stood in a half-crouch, shuffled slowly forward. Facing him with an easy smile stood Tristano the Earthman. "Careful, friend," said Tristano in the clipped flat Earth accent. "Give me trouble and Smade pitches you into the sea."

Dasce came out the door, followed by the Sarcoy poisoner. Tristano joined them, the three walked to the space-port. Gersen remained on the terrace.

Ten minutes later two ships rose into the night. The first was a squat armored vessel, with weapons fore and aft. The second was a battered old locator's ship, Model 9B.

Gersen stared in wonder. The second ship was his own.

The ships disappeared, the sky once more was empty. Gersen returned into the tavern and sat before the fire. Presently he brought forth the envelope given



him by Lugo Teehalt, opened it and extracted three photographs, which he examined for the better part of an hour.

The fire burnt low. Smade took himself to bed, leaving a son dozing behind the bar. Outside the night rains began to thrash down, lightning crackled, the ocean groaned.

Gersen sat in deep thought. Presently from his pocket he brought a sheet of paper, which listed five names:

Grendel (the Monster)
Howard Alan Treesong
Viole Falushe
Kokor Hekkus (the Killing Machine)

Lens Larque

From his pocket he brought a pencil, but still he deliberated. If he continually added names to his list he would never finish. Of course there was no real need to write. There was no real need for a list: Gersen knew the five names as well as he knew his own. He compromised. To the right and below the last name of the original list he appended a sixth name: Hildemar Dasce.

For a space he sat looking at the names, with two sides to his mind: the one so alive and passionate that the other, the cerebral detached observer, felt a trace of amusement.



ILLUSTRATED
BY
EMSH

The flames settled low, chunks of fossilized moss glowed scarlet. The sea-sound was slower and lower in pitch. Gersen rose to his feet and climbed the stone stairs to his room.

During his life Gersen had known little other than a succession of strange beds. Nevertheless sleep came slowly, and he lay staring into the dark. Visions passed before him, from as early as he could remember: a landscape which, as he recalled, seemed wonderfully pleasant and bright. There were tawny mountains, a village painted in faded pastel colors along the banks of a wide tawny river. But this picture, as always, was fol-

lowed by another even more vivid: the same landscape, littered with hacked and bleeding bodies. Men and women and children shuffled into the holds of five long ships under the weapons of two score men in what seemed strange and outlandish costumes. With an old man who was his grandfather, Gersen watched horrified from across the river, concealed from the slavers by the bulk of an old barge. When the ships had lifted, they returned across the river. Then his grandfather told him, "Many things your father had planned for you. Learning and useful work and a life of satisfaction and peace. Do you recall this?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"The learning you shall have. You will learn patience and resource, the ability of your hands and your mind. You will have useful work: the destruction of evil men. What work could be more useful? This is Beyond; you will find that your work is never done—so therefore you may never know a life of peace. However I guarantee you ample satisfaction: for I will teach you to crave the blood of these men more than the flesh of woman."

The old man had been as good as his word. Eventually they made their way to Earth, the ultimate repository of every sort of knowledge.

Young Kirth learned many things, from a succession of strange teachers which it would be tedious to detail. He killed his first man at the age of fourteen: a footpad who had the ill-luck to accost them in a back alley of Rotterdam. While his grandfather stood by, in the manner of an old fox teaching a cub to hunt, young Kirth, gasping and sobbing, broke first the ankle, then the neck of the astonished assailant.

From Earth they moved to Alphanor, capitol planet of the Rigel Concourse, and here Kirth Gersen gained more conventional knowledge. When he was

nineteen his grandfather died, bequeathing him a comfortable sum of money and a letter which read:

My dear Kirth:

I have seldom told of my affection and high regard for you; I take this occasion to do so. You have come to mean more to me than ever did my own son. I will not say I am sorry that I have set your feet in the path they now must take, even though you will be denied many ordinary pleasures and luxuries. Have I been presumptuous in so shaping your life? I think not. For several years you have been self-motivated, and have showed no inclination to point yourself in any other direction. In any event I can think of no more useful service for a man to perform than that which I have ordained for you. The Law of Man is bounded by the limits of the Oikumene. Good and evil, however, are ideas which encompass the universe; unluckily, beyond the Pale there are few to ensure the triumph of good over evil.

Actually the triumph consists of two processes: first evil must be extinguished, then good must be introduced to fill the gap. It is impossible that a man should be equally efficacious in both functions. Good and evil, in spite of a traditional fallacy, are not

polarities, nor mirror images, nor is one merely the absence of the other. In order to minimize confusion, your work will merely be the destruction of evil men. What is an evil man? The man is evil who coerces obedience to his private ends, destroys beauty, produces pain, extinguishes life. It must be remembered that killing evil men is not equivalent to expunging evil, which is a relationship between a situation and an individual. A poisonous spore will grow only in a nutrient soil. In this case the nutrient soil is Beyond, and since no human effort can alter the Beyond (which must always exist), you must devote your efforts to destroying the poisonous spores, which are evil men. It is a task of which you will never see the end.

Our sharpest and first motivation in this matter, agreed, is no more than a primitive ache for revenge. Five pirate captains destroyed certain lives and enslaved other who were precious to us. Revenge is not an ignoble motive, when it works to a productive end. The names of these five pirate captains I do not know. My best attempts have brought me no information. One man, an underling, I recognized: his name is Parsifal Pankarow, and he is no less baneful than the five captains, though his po-

tentialities for harm are less. You must seek him Beyond and learn from him the names of the five.

Then you must kill the five, and it will do no harm if they suffer pain in the process, for they have brought an immeasurable amount of pain and grief to others.

There is still much for you to learn. I would advise you to join the Institute, except I fear that the disciplines of this body would not set well with you. Do as you think best. In my youth I thought to become a catechumen, but Destiny ruled otherwise. If I were friends with a Fellow I would send you to him for counsel—but I have no such friend. Perhaps you will be less constricted outside the Institute. Stringent conditions are imposed upon the catechumen through the first fourteen degrees.

In any event, I advise you to devote a time to the study of Sarkoy poisons and hand-techniques, preferably on Sarkoy itself. There is room for improvement in your marksmanship and knife-play, though you need fear few men at hand-fighting. Your intuitive judgments are good; your self control, economy of action, and versatility are to be commended. But—you still have much to learn. For the next ten years, study, train—and be

cautious. There are many other capable men. Do not rashly waste yourself against them until you are more than ready. In short, do not make an overvirtue of courage or heroism. A goodly amount of caution — call it fear or even cowardice — is a highly desirable adjunct for a man such as yourself, whose one fault might be said to be a mystical, almost superstitious, faith in the success of your destiny. Do not be fooled. We are all mortal, as I now attest.

So, my grandson, I am dead. I have trained you to know good from evil. I feel only pride in my accomplishment, and hope that you will remember me with affection and respect.

Your loving grandfather,
Rolf Harpit Gersen

For eleven years Kirth Gersen obeyed the dictates of his grandfather, or exceeded them, meanwhile seeking both within the Oikumene and Beyond for Parsifal Pankarow, but fruitlessly.

Few occupations offered more challenge, more hazard, more chilling rebuffs to incompetence than weasling for the IPCC. Gersen undertook two assignments, on Pharode and Blue Planet. During the term of this latter, he submitted a preemptive requisition for information

regarding Parsifal Pankarow, and felt himself well rewarded to learn that Parsifal Pankarow currently resided at Brinktown, where he was Ira Bugloss, operator of a prosperous import business.

Gersen found Ira Bugloss, or Pankarow, to be a burly hearty man, egg-bald, his skin dyed lemon-yellow with mustachios which were wide, black and luxuriant.

Brinktown occupied a plateau which stood like an island in a black and orange jungle. Gersen scrutinized Pankarow's movements for two weeks, learned his routine, which was that of a man without a care. Then one evening he hired a cab, rendered the operator unconscious, waited outside the Jodisei Conversation and Flower Arranging Club, until Pankarow tired of sporting with the inmates and emerged into the humid Brinktown night. Well pleased with himself, humming a tune he had just learned, he staggered into the cab and was conveyed, not to his vast and sumptuous home, but to a remote clearing in the jungle.

Here Gersen put questions which Pankarow had no wish to answer. Pankarow made an effort to hold his tongue, to no avail. Finally five names were wrung from his memory. "Now

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what will you do with me?" croaked the erstwhile Ira Bugloss.

"I will kill you," said Gersen, pale and quivering after exercise he did not enjoy. "I have made you my enemy. Furthermore you deserve to die a hundred times over."

"At one time, yes!" cried the sweating Pankarow. "Now I lead a blameless life, I injure no one!"

Gersen wondered if every such occasion would cause him such nausea, misgivings and misery. He responded in a voice held crisp and even by enormous effort. "What you say perhaps is true, but your wealth stinks of pain. And certainly you will make a report to the first agent of any of the five you meet."

"No. I swear not. And my wealth—take it all."

"Where is your wealth?"

Pankarow tried to make conditions. "I will lead you to it."

Gersen shook his head sadly. "Accept my excuses. You are about to die. It comes to all men. You had best feel that you are requiting the evil you have done—"

"Under my tombstone!" screamed Pankarow. "Under the stone tombstone before my house!"

Gersen touched a tube to Pankarow's neck, which spat a Sar-

koy poison into the skin. "I will go to look," he said. "You will sleep until you see me again." Pankarow relaxed thankfully and was dead in seconds.

Gersen returned to Brinktown, a deceptively placid settlement of tall ornate three-, four- and five-story houses embowered among green, purple and black trees. At twilight he sauntered along a quiet back lane to Pankarow's house.

The stone tombstone stood plain to see: a massive monument of marble spheres and cubes surmounted by a sculptured image of Parsifal Pankarow in a noble pose, head thrown back to the sky, arms outspread. As Gersen stood appraising it a boy thirteen or fourteen years old stepped down from the porch and approached Gersen. "Are you from my father? Is he with the fat women?"

Gersen steeled his heart to the inevitable pangs, and put aside all thought of confiscating Pankarow's wealth. "I bring a message from your father."

"Will you come in?" inquired the boy, tremulously anxious. "I'll call my mother."

"No. Please don't. I have no time. Listen carefully. Your father has been called away. He is not sure when he can return. Perhaps never."

The boy listened round-eyed. "Did he — run away?"

Gersen nodded. "Yes. Some old enemies found him, and he does not dare show himself. He said to tell you or your mother that money is hidden under the tombstone."

The boy stared at Gersen. "Who are you?"

"A messenger, no more. Tell your mother exactly what I have told you. One more thing. When you look beneath the tombstone, be careful. There may be a trap to guard the money. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Yes. A booby-trap."

"That's right. Be careful. Get the help of someone you can trust."

Gersen departed Brinktown. He thought of Smade's Planet, with its elemental quiet and isolation: precisely the antidote to his fretful conscience.

Where, he asked himself, as the locator boat skidded down a fracture in the continuum, did the balance lie? He had by no means reached the tipping point. Parsifal Pankarow deserved the callous execution he had received. But what of wife and son? They must bear the pain, but why? To protect the women and children of more deserving men from worse pain. So Gersen reassured himself. But the haunted dark look of the

boy's eyes would not leave his memory.

Destiny led him. The first night at Smade's Tavern engaged him with Grendel the Monster, the first name Parsifal Pankarow had blurted forth. In his bed Gersen heaved a deep sigh. Pankarow was dead. Poor miserable Lugo Teehalt was probably dead. All men must die; let there be an end to brooding. He grinned into the dark, thinking of Grendel (whoever he might be) and Beauty Dasce examining the monitor of his ship. To begin with they would be unable to open the monitor with their key. A formidable difficulty, even worse if they suspected thief-proofing of explosive, poison gas or acid. When after great travail they eventually extracted the filament, it would show blank. Gersen's monitor was no more than window-dressing; he had never bothered to activate it.

Grendel would look questioningly at Beauty Dasce, who would mutter some sort of objugation. Perhaps then they would think to check the serial number of the ship, only to find that it was different from that issued to Lugo Teehalt. And then: swiftly back to Smade's Planet. But by that time, Gersen would make sure that he was gone.

III

Question put to Eale Maurmath, Chief Quaestor of Tri-Planetary Police System, during a round-table television discussion, broadcast from Conover, Cuthbert, Vega. May 16, 993:

I know your problems are tremendous, Quaestor Maurmath, in fact I don't really comprehend how you get on top of them. For instance, how can you possibly locate some one particular man, or trace his background among ninety-odd inhabited planets and billions of people of all varieties of political complexion, local habit, doctrines of belief?

Answer:

Usually we can't.

Message of Lord Jaiko Jaikoska, Chairman of the Executive Board, to the Valhalla General Legislative Assembly, Valhalla, Tau Gemini, August 9, 1028:

I urge you not endorse this sinister measure. Humanity many times has had sad experience of super-powerful police forces. . . As soon as (the police) slip from under the firm thumb of a suspicious local tribune, they become arbitrary, merciless, a law to themselves. They think no more of justice,

but only of establishing themselves as a privileged and envied elite. They mistake the attitude of natural caution and uncertainty of the civilian population as admiration and respect, and presently they start to swagger back and forth jingling weapons, in megalomaniac euphoria. People thereupon become not masters, but servants. . . Such a police force becomes merely an aggregate of uniformed criminals, the more baneful in that their position is unchallenged and sanctioned by law. The police mentality cannot regard a human being in terms other than an item or object to be processed as expeditiously as possible. Public convenience or dignity means nothing. Police prerogatives assume the status of divine law. Submissiveness is demanded. If a police officer kills a civilian, it is a regrettable circumstance: the officer was possibly over-zealous. If a civilian kills a police officer all hell breaks loose. The police foam at the mouth. All other business comes to a standstill until the perpetrator of this most dastardly act is found out. Inevitably, when apprehended, he is beaten or otherwise tortured for his intolerable presumption. . . The police complain that they can-

not function efficiently, that criminals escape them. Better a hundred unchecked criminals than the despotism of one unbridled police force. Again I warn you, do not endorse this measure. If you do, I shall surely veto it.

Excerpt from address of Richard Parnell, Commissioner of Public Weal, Northern Territory, Xion, Rigel Concourse, to the Association of Police Crime Detection Agencies, at Parilia, Pilgham, Rigel, December 1, 1075:

... It is not enough to say that our problems are unique, they have become catastrophic. We are held responsible for the efficient conduct of our jobs, but are refused the necessary tools and powers to do so. A man can murder and rob anywhere within the Oikumene, jump into a waiting space-ship and be light-years away before his crime is discovered. If he passes beyond the Pale, our jurisdiction ends—at least officially, although all of us know of courageous officers who have put justice ahead of expediency and caution, and have gone beyond the Pale to make their arrests. This of course they have a right to do, since every human law becomes invalid Beyond. But the risk is their own.

More often the criminal who goes Beyond escapes scot-free. When he chooses to return into the Oikumene he may have changed his appearance, his LOSI coordinates, his fingerprints, and is safe unless he has the misfortune to be arrested for a new infraction in the community where he committed his original crime and was there genified*. Essentially, in this day of the Jarnell Intersplit, any criminal who takes a few elementary precautions can go unpunished.

This association many times has sought to establish a more satisfactory basis for crime-detection and prevention. Our main problem is the diversity with their totally disparate standards, goals and range of problems, and the consequent chaos of information files and retrieval systems. An obvious solution exists, and the association's standing recommendation is the formation of a single official police system to maintain law and order throughout the Oikumene.

The advantages of such a system are obvious: standardization of procedure, use of new equipment and ideas, unified control, a central office for the filing,

*The noun is *gene-classification*, thence to adjective *gene-classified*, abbreviated to *genified*.

indexing and cross-indexing of information, and perhaps of highest importance, the creation and maintenance of an *esprit*, a pride of profession, to attract and hold men and women of the highest abilities.

As we all know, this centralized agency has been denied us, no matter how urgently we plead its virtues. The ostensible motive behind this refusal is known to us all, and I will not dignify it by mentioning it. I will say that police morale is sinking to an ever lower level and soon may vanish—unless something is done.

Today I wish to put before the convention a proposal for the "something". Our association is the private organization of a group of private individuals. It has no official status or connection with any governmental office whatever. In short, we are free to do what we please, enter into any kind of business we please, so long as we contravene no laws.

I propose that this association go into business, that we found a private crime detection agency. The new company will be strictly a commercial proposition, financed by association money and by private subscription. Headquarters will be established at some central and convenient location, but there will

be branches on every planet. Our staff will be recruited from among members of this association and any other qualified persons. They will be well paid, from fees and profits. Where will these fees and profits derive? Primarily from local police organizations, who will use certain of the facilities of this new interplanetary agency, instead of expending large sums to maintain redundant facilities of the same sort. Since the proposed agency will be a private business organization subject to all local and interplanetary laws, the critics of our former schemes must be silenced.

... Eventually the Interworld Police Coordination Company would automatically be called upon to handle all problems of crime detection and prevention, other than those purely local, and even here the IPCC may function usefully. In due course the IPCC will certainly dwarf in scope all present and future official police groups. We will have our own laboratories, research programs, absolutely complete files, and an absolutely high-class staff—recruited as I say from members of the association, and others. Are there any questions?

A question from the floor: Is there any reason why police officers of a municipality or a

state should not simultaneously be a member of the IPCC staff?

Answer: This is a very important point. No, there is none whatever. I see no conflict between the two agencies, and there is every reason to hope that local police officials will automatically wish to become affiliated with the IPCC. This would be to the advantage of the IPCC, the local police group and the individual himself. In other words, the local police officer would have nothing to lose and everything to gain by referring cases to the IPCC and authorizing the subsequent fee if he himself were a staff member.

From Chapter III, *The IPCC: Men and Methods*, by Raoul Past.

...Nominally an intra-Oikumenic organ, the IPCC has been forced by the dynamics of its basic rationale to operate Beyond. Here, where the only laws are local ordinances and taboos, the IPCC finds little cooperation: indeed the very opposite. The IPCC operative is known as a weasel. His life is constantly balanced on a knife-edge. The Central Agency shrouds in secrecy the exact number of "weasels", and also the percentage of casualties. The first figure is suspected to be low, through difficulties of recruitment; the sec-

ond high, through both the exigencies of the work and the efforts of that most fantastic of human constructions, the De-weaseling Corps.

... The universe is infinite; worlds without end exists; but certainly one must travel far to find a situation so paradoxical, whimsical, and grim as this: that the single discipline organization of the Beyond exists only to extirpate the nominal forces of law and order.

Gersen awoke in the strange bed, the sky through the small square window only vaguely gray. He dressed, descended the stone steps to the hall where he found one of Smade's sons, a dour dark lad of twelve, fanning the coals in the fireplace to life. He bade Gerson a gruff "Good morning", but seemed indisposed for further conversation. Gersen stepped outside on the terrace. Pre-dawn mist concealed the ocean, rolling in sheets and curls across the heath—a dreary monochromatic scene. The sense of isolation was suddenly oppressive. Gersen returned inside to warm himself at the new fire.

The boy was sweeping the hearth. "Killing last night," he told Gersen in gloomy satisfaction. "Little thin man got it. Right behind the moss-shed."

"Is the body there?" Gersen asked presently.

"No. No body. They took it with them. Three bad ones, maybe four. Father is black mad they did their dirt inside the fence."

Gersen grunted, displeased with every aspect of the situation. He asked for breakfast, which was presently forthcoming. As he ate, the dwarf sun lifted above the mountains, a brittle white wafer barely visible through the mist. An on-shore wind came. When Gersen once more went outside the sky was clear, though fog wisps still blew in from the oily sea.

Gersen walked north along the shelf between ocean cliffs and mountains. Underfoot was a carpet of spongy gray moss, redolent with a musty resinous odor. The sunlight streamed over his head, out to sea, the black water giving back no glint or reflection. He went to the edge of the cliff and looked down two hundred feet to the rise and fall of the water. He tossed a stone, watched the splash, and the ripples quickly absorbed in the larger motion. What would it be like, he wondered, to sail a boat on this ocean? Out across the horizons, with the whole world to explore; barren coasts, bleak headlands, tall stern islands, with no sight of human

being or dwelling until the return to Smade's Tavern. Gersen turned away from the cliff and continued north. He passed the mouth of a valley fenced in against Smade's cattle. Teehalt certainly had not left his boat here. A quarter mile ahead a spur of the mountains humped down almost to the sea. In the shadow of the ridge Gersen found Teehalt's boat.

He made a quick inspection. The vessel was indeed a Model 9B, identical to his own. The gear and machinery seemed in good order. In a housing under the bow-bulge hung the monitor which had cost Teehalt his life.

Gersen returned to the tavern. His original plan had been to spend several days. It must be altered: Grendel might discover his mistake and return with Hildemar Dase and the two assassins. They would wish to take Teehalt's monitor, and this Gersen was resolved they should not do, though he did not care to risk his life in the effort.

Returning to the taven he noted that the landing field was empty. The Star King had departed. This morning? Or during the night? Gersen had no idea. He settled his score and, moved by some obscure impulse paid Lugo Teehalt's bill.

Smade made no comment. He

was clearly consumed by cold fury. His eyes showed white around the drab irises, his nostrils were distended, his chin jutted forward. The rage was not on Lugo Teehalt's behalf, Gersen realized. The murderer, whoever he might be — Dasce had mentioned Grendel — had flouted Smade's law, he had disturbed the serenity of Smade's Tavern, he had wronged Smade. Politely Gersen inquired, "When did the Star King leave?" Smade merely glared silently back at him like an angry Black Angus bull.

Gersen gathered his small packet of belongings and departed the tavern, declining the twelve-year-old boys proffer of assistance. Once more he walked north. Crossing the ridge, he looked back toward the tavern. Staunch and secure it stood facing the sea, utterly alone. Gersen shook his head dubiously and turned away. "Everyone is the same," he told himself. "Anxious to arrive. And when they leave, wondering why they came."

A few minutes later he took Teehalt's boat aloft on its boosters, then pointed it back toward the Oikumene and cut in the oversplit. Smade's Planet dwindled astern, and with its white dwarf sun, presently became lost, a single spark among

a million. Stars slid by like fireflies blown on a dark wind, the light reaching Gersen's eyes by back-splash or back-curl, wherein the Doppler effect played no role. Perspective was lost; the eye was fooled. Stars moved astern, the near slipping across the far. Within hand-reach? A hundred yards distant? Ten miles? The eye had no tool by which to judge.

Gersen set the star-finder to the index of Rigel, engaged the auto-pilot and made himself as comfortable as the spartan facilities of the Model 9B permitted.

The visit to Smade's Tavern had served him well, though the profit had been bought by Lugo Teehalt's death. Grendel wanted Lugo Teehalt's monitor: this was the premise which controlled the shape of the future. Grendel would be willing to enter negotiations, and with equal certainty he would act through an agent. Although, thought Gersen, he had seen fit to kill Lugo Teehalt at first hand...

There was something puzzling here. Why need Lugo Teehalt die? Sheer malice on the part of Grendel? Not impossible. But Grendel had killed and ravaged so extensively that taking the life of one thin miserable man could provide him only the smallest gratification. The motive more likely was habit: sheer off-hand-

ed casual habit. To sever relations with a man who might be inconvenient, you killed him...

A third possibility: had Teehalt penetrated the anonymity which Grendel, among all the Demon Princes, held of supreme importance? Gersen reviewed his conversation with Teehalt. For all his ravaged and woe-begone appearance, Teehalt had used educated speech. He had seen better days. Why had he turned to the disreputable profession of locating? Gersen shrugged. Why did a man set himself in any specific direction? Why did a man, presumably born of ordinary parents, become Grendel the Monster?

Teehalt had hinted or implied that Grendel was somehow involved in the leasing of the locator-ship. With this thought in mind Gersen made a careful inspection of the ship. He found the traditional brass plate, naming the place of manufacture: Liverstone on Fiamme, a planet of the Rigel Concourse. The monitor likewise carried a bronze flake detailing its serial number and the manufacturer: the Feritze Precision Instruments Company, at Sansontiana on Olliphane, also of the Concourse. But there was no indication of the owner, no evidence of registration.

It would be necessary, then, to trace ownership of the boat indirectly. Gersen set himself to consider the problem.

Estate houses maintained two-thirds of all locator ships, their stock in trade consisting of worlds with specific attributes: planets highly mineralized, planets suitable for colonization by dissident groups, planets pleasant enough to serve as a millionaire's reserve, planets distinguished by a sufficiently interesting flora and fauna to attract curio dealers or biologists; most rarely, planets supporting intelligent or semi-intelligent life, of interest to sociologists, cultural taxonomists, linguists and the like. The estate houses were concentrated in the cosmopolitan centers of the Oikumene: three or four worlds of the Concourse, chief among them Alphanor; Vega's Cuthbert, Boniface, Aloyisius Novval; Pi Cassiopeia's Copus and Orpo; Quantique; Old Earth. The Concourse would be the logical starting-place, if in fact Lugo Teehalt worked for an estate house.

But this was by no means certain. In fact, as Gersen seemed to recall, Teehalt had implied otherwise. If so, the investigation was narrowed considerably. Next to the estate houses, universities and research institutes

were the chief employers of locaters. And Gersen had a new thought. If Teehalt had been either a student or faculty member at some specific lyceum, college or university, he would probably apply to this same institution for employment... Gersen corrected his thinking: the conjecture was not necessarily probable. A proud man, with friends and associates who might remember him, would use his old school in this fashion only as a last resort. Was Lugo Teehalt proud? Not in this way, or so it seemed to Gersen. Teehalt had seemed a man who might easily turn to his old haven for security.

There was another obvious source of information: the Feritse Precision Instrument Company at Sansontiana, where the monitor would be registered in the name of its purchaser. And another reason for visiting the Feritse Precision Instrument Company: Gersen wanted to open the monitor and remove the filament. To this end he needed a key. Monitors were often tamper-proofed with explosive capsules or corrosive; violent extraction of the filament seldom yielded useful information.

The officials of the Feritse Company might or might not

prove accommodating. Sansontiana was a city of Braichis, one of Olliphane's nineteen independent nations. The Braichish were a headstrong, involute, altogether peculiar people. Concourse law, however, repudiated private claims beyond the Pale, and discouraged the use of explosive traps. Hence, in an ordinance detailing the equipment required aboard spacecraft: "The manufacturers of such devices (referring to monitors) are thereupon enjoined and required to furnish keys, switching devices, code-sticks, number sequences or any other tool, appliance or information necessary to the safe opening of the instrument in question, without delay, complaint, error, exorbitant charge, or any behavior or act calculated to deter the petitioner from obtaining the key, coded device or information demanded, if and when the petitioner is able to demonstrate ownership of said instrument. Presentation of the serial plate affixed by the manufacturer to the instrument shall be deemed sufficient and adequate evidence of ownership."

All well and good. Gersen could secure the key, but the company need not furnish information as to previous registration of the instrument. Especially if Grendel should sus-

pect that Gersen might come to Sansontiana with such a purpose in mind, and take steps to preclude the contingency.

The thought opened a set of new vistas. Gersen frowned. Had his temperament been other than careful and orderly, these various options and possibilities might not occur to him. He would be saved a great deal of difficulty, but he probably would die sooner...

He shook his head in resignation and reached for the star-charts.

Not far off his line of fission was the star Cygnus T342, and its planet Euville where an un-

pleasant and psychotic population lived in five cities: Oni, Me, Che, Dun and Ve, each compulsively built in pentagonal patterns, from a central five-sided citadel. The space-port, on a remote island, was opprobriously named "Orifice". Everything Gersen needed could be found at the space-port; he had no desire to visit the cities, especially since each required in lieu of passport, the tattooing of a star on the forehead, a different color for each city. To visit all five cities the prospective tourist must display five colored stars: orange, black, mauve, yellow and green.

IV

From *New Discoveries in Space*, by Ralph Quarry:

...Sir Julian Hove apparently derived his attitudes from the late Renaissance explorers. Upon return to Earth members of his crews imposed upon themselves (or had imposed) a strict rule of discretion and secrecy. Details nevertheless leaked out. Sir Julian Hove was, to use the most comprehensive term, a martinet. He was likewise a man utterly without humor. His eye was bleak, he spoke without moving his lips, his hair was combed day after day in photographic-ly identical furrows. While he

did not actually require that the personnel wear dinner jackets to meals, certain of his rules imposed an almost equivalent punctilio... The use of first names was eschewed; salutes were exchanged at the beginning and termination of each watch, even though the personnel was by and large civilian. Technicians whose specialties were without scientific pertinence were forbidden to set foot on the fascinating new worlds, an order which came close to fomenting mutiny, until Sir Julian's second in command prevailed upon Sir Julian to ameliorate it.

The Rigel Concourse is Sir Julian's most noteworthy discovery: twenty-six magnificent planets, most of them not only habitable but salubrious, though only two display even quasi-intelligent autochthones... Sir Julian, exercising his prerogatives, named the planets for boyhood heroes: *Lord Kitchener, William Gladstone, Archbishop Rollo Gore, Edythe MacDevott, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Carlyle, William Kircudbright, Samuel B. Gorsham, Sir Robert Peel*, and the like.

But Sir Julian was to be deprived of his privilege. He telegraphed ahead the news of his return to Maudley Space Station, together with a description of the Concourse and the names he had bestowed upon the members of this magnificent group. The list passed through the hands of an obscure young clerk, one Roger Pilgham, who rejected Sir Julian's nominations in disgust. To each of the twenty-six planets he assigned a letter of the alphabet and hurriedly supplied new names: Alphanor, Barleycorn, Chrysanthe, Diogenes, Elfland, Fiamme, Goshen, Hardacres, Image, Jezebel, Krokinole, Lyonesse, Madagascar, Nowhere Olliphane, Pilgham, Quinine, Raratonga, Somewhere, Tantamount, Unicorn, Vakande, Walpurgis, Xion, Ys

and Zacaranda — the names derived from legend, myth, romance and his own whimsy. Only one of the worlds was accompanied by a satellite, described in the dispatch as "an eccentric, tumbling, odd-shaped fragment of chondritic pumice", and this Roger Pilgham named Sir Julian.

The press received and published the list and Rigel's planets became so known, though Sir Julian's acquaintances wondered about the sudden extravagance of his imagination. And who, or what, was "Pilgham"? Sir Julian presumably would explain upon his arrival.

The clerk, Roger Pilgham, presently returns to the obscurity from which he sprang, and there is no record of his conduct or state of mind as Sir Julian's return became imminent. Did he feel apprehension? Uneasiness? Indifference? Beyond all doubt he had become resigned to the prospect of discharge from his position.

In due course Sir Julian made a triumphant return, and in due course used the phrase, "most impressive perhaps are the New Grampian Mountains on the North Continent of Lord Bulwer-Lytton". A member of the audience politely asked the whereabouts of Lord Bulwer-Lytton, and the change was revealed.

Sir Julian's reaction to the deed was one of extraordinary fury. The clerk prudently went into seclusion; Sir Julian was encouraged to reintroduce his own nominations, but the damage had been done; Roger Pilgham's brash deed caught the fancy of the public, and Sir Julian's terminology gradually faded from memory.

From popular Handbook of the Planets, 303rd Edition, published 1292:

Alphanor, a planet considered the administrative node and cultural center of the Rigel Concourse. It is eighth in orbital order.

Planetary Constants:

Diameter, 9300 miles.

Mass, 102.

Mean Day, 29 hours, 16 minutes, 29.4 seconds.

etc.

General Remarks: Alphanor is a large bright sea-world, with a generally bracing climate. Ocean occupies three-quarters of the total surface, including the polar ice floes. The land mass is divided into seven nearly contiguous continents: Phrygia, Umbria, Lusitania, Scythia, Etruria, Lydia and Lycia, in a configuration suggesting seven petals of a flower. There are uncounted islands.

Autochthonous life is complex

and vigorous. The flora has in no way yielded to terrestrial imports, which must be carefully tended and nurtured. The fauna is likewise complex, and on occasion actively savage, to cite the clever hyrcan major of upper Phrygia, and the invisible eel of the Thaumaturge Ocean.

The political structure of Alphanor is a pyramidal democracy — simple in theory, intricate in practice. The continents are divided into provinces, thence prefectures, districts and wards: these latter defined as population blocs of five thousand persons. Each ward committee sends a representative to the district council, which elects a delegate to the prefectural diet, which in turn is represented at the district assembly, which sends a member to provincial congress, which does likewise for the continental parliament. Each parliament elects seven rectors to the grand Council at Avente, in the Sea Province of Umbria, which thereupon chooses a chairman.

From Preface to Peoples of the Concourse, by Strick and Chernitz:

The concourse populations are far from homogeneous. During the migrations from Earth racial groups tended to follow their own, and in the new environ-

ments, under the influence of interbreeding and new behavior patterns, such groups specialized even further... The folk of Alphanor in general are fair, brown-haired, of medium stature, though an hour's walk along the Grand Esplanade at Avente will show the observer every conceivable style of human being.

The Alphanor psychology is more difficult to express. Every inhabited world is different in this regard; and though the differences are real and distinct enough, it is hard to present them accurately without discursiveness — especially since each planet-wide generalization is compounded, vitiated, or contradicted by regional differences.

Rigel, dead ahead, was a bright blue - white point from which every other star seemed to flee. Gersen had little to do but contemplate his destination, speculate regarding Grendel's probable intentions and formulate his own set of responses. The first problem: where to land? One hundred and eighty-three spaceports on twenty-two of the twenty-six worlds were convenient to his lawful use — as well as unlimited desert and wasteland, should he choose the quarantine laws.

How intensely did Grendel want Teehalt's monitor? Would

he arrange a watch at every space-port? Theoretically, this could be done, by the suborning of port officials. The cheapest and perhaps most effective system would be to offer a resounding reward to the man who reported Gersen's arrival. Gersen of course might choose to set down at another star system. It would be difficult to mount guard over every space-port of the Oikumene.

But it was by no means Gersen's purpose to go into hiding. In the next phase of proceedings he must necessarily expose himself. This next phase was the identification of Grendel. Two methods to this end suggested themselves: he could either trace the registry of the monitor, or await the approach of some member of Grendel's organization, and then try to trace the nerve of authority back to its source.

Grendel would take for granted Gersen's intent to investigate the monitor, and would presumably concentrate his vigilance at the Kindune space-port, which served Sansontiana.

Nevertheless, for a series of indefinite reasons, little more than hunches, Gersen decided to land at the Grand Interplanetary Space-port at Avente.

He approached Alphanor, coasted down into landing orbit,

locked his auto-pilot into the official landing program and once more sat back. The boat settled, bumped in a roar of expiring jets upon the scorched red earth. The jets died there was silence. Automatically the pressure-equalizing valve began to hiss.

The port officials approached in a slide-car. Gersen answered questions, submitted to a brief medical inspection and received an entry permit. The officials departed. A mobile crane trundled up, lifted the boat, carried it to a bay in the storage line at one side of the field.

Gersen descended to the ground and started to detach the monitor, keeping a careful lookout in all directions.

Two men sauntered along the storage line, casually, or so it seemed. Gersen recognized one of them instantly: the Sarkoy who had followed Hildemar Dasce into Smade's Tavern.

As they approached, Gersen gave no overt heed, but they made no twitch or move that he did not observe. The Sarkoy wore a modest suit of dark gray with epaulettes embroidered with opals; his companion, a thin sandy-haired man with dancing white-gray eyes, wore a laborer's loose blue coverall.

The two stopped a few feet from Gersen, stood watching as if in casual interest. Gersen, af-

ter a glance, ignored them. The Sarkoy muttered something to his associate, came a little forward. "I think we've met?" His voice was soft, sardonic.

"Your name evades me," said Gerson politely.

"I am Sivij Suthiro."

Gersen examined him carefully, seeing a man of middle weight, with the curious flat head of the Sarkoy Steppe-man,* the face wider than high. Suth-

*The Sarkoy were held in low esteem by other peoples of the Oikumene, by virtue of repugnant eating habits, gross and exhibitionistic sexual conduct. Also despised was the popular Sarkoy sport known as *harbite*, or the baiting of a harikap, a large bristle-furred semi-intelligent biped of the north forests. The wretched creature, brought to a state of tension by hunger, would be thrust into a circle of men armed with pitchforks and torches, stimulated to wild activity by being set on fire, thrust deftly with pitchforks back into the center of the circle as it sought to escape.

Sarkovy, the single planet of Phi Ophiuchi, was a dim world of steppes, swamps, black forests, morasses. The Sarkoy lived in tall wooden houses behind timber palisades; not even the largest of the towns was secure from the attack of bandits and nomads from the wastelands. By practice and tradition the Sarkoy were accomplished poisoners. A Master Venefice reportedly could kill a man merely by walking past him.

iro's eyes were soft dead olive-drab, the nose snub and dark of nostril, the mouth wide, thick-lipped — a face shaped by more than a thousand years of specialization and inbreeding.

Gersen could not detect the "breath of death": an accomplishment forced upon indentured assassins, which shortened their lives, gave the skin a yellowish glaze and caused the hair to stiffen. Suthiro's skin was untuned pallid ivory. His hair was a glossy black pelt, and he wore tattooed on his right cheek the small Maltese cross of the Sarkoy hetman.

Gersen said, "My apologies, Scop Suthiro. I don't remember the occasion you mention."

"Ah." Suthiro's eyes widened at Gersen's use of the honorific. "You have visited Sarkovy. Dear green Sarkovy, its boundless steppe, its merry festivals!"

"Merry, so long as the harikarp last. Then what will you torture?"

Suthiro, of a race inured to insult, took no offence. "We always have each other. I see you know my planet well."

"Fairly well. Perhaps you remember me from Sarkovy."

"No," said Suthiro wryly. "Elsewhere and more recently."

Gersen shook his head. "Impossible. I have just come in from Beyond."

"Exactly. We met Beyond. At Smade's Tavern."

"Indeed."

"Yes. With certain others I came to meet my friend Lugo Teehalt. In the confusion and excitement Lugo left Smade's Planet in your space-ship. Surely you are aware of this?"

Gersen laughed. "If Teehalt has either apologies or complaints, I'm sure he will seek me out."

"Exactly," said Suthiro. "Lugo Teehalt sent me to make adjustment. He begs forgiveness for his mistake, and wishes only that I recover his monitor."

Gersen shook his head. "You can't have it."

"No?" Suthiro moved closer. "Lugo offers a thousand SVU* to indemnify you for his mistake."

"I accept with thanks. Give me the money."

"And the monitor?"

"I will return it when he comes for it."

The thin-faced man made an irritable clicking sound, but Suthiro grinned. "This is not exactly feasible. You will have the money, but we will not have the monitor."

"There is no reason why you

*SVU: Standard Value Unit of the Oikumene.

should have the monitor. I will give Lugo Teehalt his monitor. However it is perfectly legitimate for you to give me the money. Unless, of course, you distrust my honesty."

"By no means, since we do not intend to put it to the test. We propose, in fact, to take the monitor at this moment."

"I think not," said Gersen. "I plan to take possession of the filament."

"This is out of the question!" said Suthiro gently.

"Try to stop me," Gersen returned to work, disengaged the seals from the monitor housing.

Suthiro watched placidly. He made a signal to the thin-faced man who backed away and kept lookout. "I could stop you so suddenly you'd become a marble statue." He looked over his shoulder to the thin-faced man, who nodded. Suthiro exhibited a weapon he carried in his hand. "I can provide you a heart spasm, a brain hemorrhage, or a convulsion of the small intestine, whichever you prefer."

Gersen paused in his work. "Your arguments are impressive. Pay me five thousand SVU."

"I need pay you nothing. But here is the thousand I mentioned." He tossed Gersen a packet of notes, motioned to the thin-faced man who came forward, took Gersen's tools and expertly

detached the monitor. Gersen counted the money, moved to the side. The two dropped the monitor into a bag, and without another word departed.

Gersen laughed quietly. This was the monitor he had bought and installed at Euville, at a cost of four hundred SVU. Teehalt's monitor was safe inside the ship.

Gersen returned into the ship, closed the ports. Time now was of the essence. Suthiro would require about ten minutes to communicate his success, either to Dasce or conceivably to Grendel himself. Messages would then go out to various other space-ports of the Concourse, calling off the alert. Grendel would not receive the monitor, if Gersen were in luck, for several hours, perhaps not for days, depending upon his whereabouts. There would be an additional delay while the deception was discovered, and then Grendel's organization would once again be mobilized, the focus now upon the Feritze Precision Instrument Company at Sansontiana, on the planet of Olliphane.

By this time Gersen hoped to be there and gone. Certainly he would have no time to spare. Without further delay he started the jets, rose into the blue Alphanor sky and pointed the boat toward Olliphane.

From *Popular Handbook of the Planets*;

Olliphane, nineteenth planet of the Rigel Concourse.

Planetary Constants:

Diameter, 6700 miles

Mass, 0.9

etc.

General Remarks: Olliphane is the most dense of the Rigel planets, and orbits close at the outer edge of the Habitable Zone. It has been speculated that when the proto-planet of the Third Group disintegrated Olliphane received and unduly large share of core materials. In any event, until recent astronomic times, Alliphane was subject to intense plutonic activity, and even today boasts ninety-two active volcanoes.

Olliphane is highly mineralized. An imposing relief provides vast hydro-electric potential, furnishing cheaper energy than is possible from traditional sources. A diligent, disciplined population, utilizing these advantages, has made Olliphane the most highly industrialized world of the Concourse, rivaled only by Tantamount, with its shipyards, and Lyonesse, with its monumental Gnome Iron Works.

Olliphane is relatively cool and wet, with the population concentrated in the Equatorial Zone, notably around the shores of Lake Clare. Here the visitor will find the ten largest cities of the planet, led by Kindune, Sansontiana and New Ossining.

Olliphane is likewise nutritionally self-sufficient. Few other than natural foods are consumed, of which per capita consumption is highest in the Concourse, third highest among major worlds of the Oikumene. The alpine valleys surrounding the lake are devoted to dairying and the production of greenstuffs.

The Olphs are a mingled stock, derived primarily from a colony of Hyperborean Skakers. They are typically blond to brown of hair, large-boned, often inclined to corpulence, with fair undyed skins. They are respectful of orthodoxy, sedate in personal lives, but notoriously enthusiastic during the public fetes and celebrations which serve as emotional release to an otherwise conventional and reserved folk.

A caste system, though without legal status, permeates every phase of the social structure. Prerogatives are carefully defined, jealously observed; the language has expanded and loos-



RAUSH

ened to provide at least a dozen styles of address.

From *A Study of Inter-Class Accommodations*, by Frerb Hankbert, in *Journal of the Anthropocene*, Vol. MCXIII: It is a remarkable experience for a visitor to watch a pair of Olphs, strange to each other, appraising each other for caste. The operation requires no more than an instant, and appears almost intuitive, for the persons concerned may well be wearing standard garments.

I have questioned many Olphs in this matter, and can still make no definite assertions. In the first place most Olphs blandly deny the existence of caste structure, and consider their society completely egalitarian. In the second place, the Olphs themselves are not quite sure how they divine the caste of a stranger. He either has more of the quality known as *haute* than oneself, or less.

I have theorized that rapid, unconscious and almost undetectable eye-movements are the key to the assessment of *haute*, with characteristic shifts or steadiness indicative of each caste. Hands and hand motions may play a similar function.

As might be expected high officials of the bureaucracy enjoy the most exalted caste, and espe-

cially the Civic Tutelars, as the Olphs name their police.

Gersen landed at the Kine-dune space-port and, with Teehalt's monitor in a suitcase, boarded a subway for Sansontiana. To the best of his knowledge no one had heeded his arrival, no one had followed him.

But now time was growing short. At any moment Grendel must realize he had been duped and would seek to re-establish contact. For the moment Gersen considered himself safe; nevertheless, he performed a few classic maneuvers to disengage himself from stick-tight* or tracker. Finding nothing to dis-

*Stick-tight — these come in at least five varieties, suitable to various applications:

The servo-optical: a spy-cell supported on rotary wings, remotely guided by an operator.

The automatic: a similar cell to follow a radioactive or monochromatic tag fixed to, or smeared upon, man or vehicle.

The Culp spy-master: a semi-intelligent flying creature trained to follow any subject of interest; clever, cooperative, reliable, but relatively large and noticeable.

The Manx spy-bird: a smaller, less obtrusive creature, trained to perform similarly; less docile and intelligent, more aggressive.

The Manx spy-bird modification: similar to the above, equipped with control devices.

concert him, he deposited the monitor in a public locker, at the subway interchange under the Rapunzel Hotel, retaining only the brass serial plate. Then, boarding an express car, he was delivered in fifteen minutes to Sansontiana eighty miles south. He consulted a directory, transferred to a local for the Ferristoun District, and presently was discharged into a station only a few hundred yards from the Feritse Precision Instrument Company.

Ferristoun was a dismal district of industrial structures, warehouses, an occasional tavern: these latter cheerful little nooks, lavish with ornament, colored glass and carved wood, in emulation of the grand pleasure arcades along the lakeshore.

The time was middle morning. Rain had darkened the black cobblestone pavement. Six-wheel drays lumbered along the streets. The entire district sounded to a subdued hum of engines. As Gersen walked, a short sharp bleat of whistle signaled a change of shift, and the sidewalks at once became crowded with workers. They were pale people, blank and humorless of face, wearing warm, well-made coveralls in one of three colors, gray, dark-blue or mustard yellow; a contrasting belt, either black or white; black round-

topped kaftans. All were standard issue, the government being an elaborate syndicalism, as thoroughgoing, careful and humorless as its constituency.

Two further bleats of the whistle sounded. As if by magic the streets cleared, the workers ducking into buildings like cockroaches exposed to the blinding light.

A moment later Gersen came to a stained concrete facade on which large bronze letters read FERITSE, and below, in the hooked Olph script: *Precision instruments*. A single small door led into the building. Gersen entered, to find himself in a long dim hallway, a concrete tunnel, which after a hundred feet brought him to the administration offices. He went to stand at a counter, and was approached by an elderly woman of pleasant appearance and manner. By local custom, she wore masculine garments while at work: a dark blue suit with a black belt. Recognizing Gersen as an off-worlder, of unguessable caste, she bowed with unctuous courtesy, and asked in a low reverent voice: "How, sir, may we serve you?"

Gersen tendered the brass plate.

"I have lost the key to my monitor, and I want to get a duplicate made."

The woman blinked. Her manner underwent an instant, if unconscious, change. She reached hesitantly for the plate, held it between thumb and forefinger as if it were tainted, looked over her shoulder.

"Well?" asked Gersen in a voice made suddenly harsh by tension. "Is there any difficulty?"

"There are new regulations," the woman muttered. "I have had instructions to... I must consult Director-Controller Masensen. Excuse me, sir."

She went almost at a trot to a side door, disappeared. Gersen waited, the subconscious perceivers in his brain ticking and pricking. He was more nervous than he cared to be. Nervousness clouded the judgment, affected the accuracy of observation.

The woman slowly returned to the counter, looking to right and left, evading Gersen's eyes. "Just a moment, sir. If you will wait... There are records to be inspected isn't this the way always? When a person wishes haste..."

"Where is the serial plate?" asked Gersen.

"Director-Controller Masensen has taken it into charge."

"In that case, I'll speak to Director-Controller Masensen at once."

"I will inquire," she said.

"Please don't bother," said Gersen. Ignoring her startled squeak of protest he let himself through a swinging door, passed ahead of her into the inner chamber. A portly thick-faced man in faddish Special Issue blue and dove gray sat at a desk talking into a telephone. He looked at the brass serial plate as he spoke. At the sight of Gersen his eyebrows rose, his mouth sagged in irritation and dismay. Quickly he laid down the telephone. There was an instant while his eyes flicked up and down Gersen's clothes before he shouted, "Who are you, sir? Why do you come into my room?"

Gersen reached across the desk, took possession of the serial plate. "Who do you telephone in connection with this matter?"

Masensen became fiercely haughty. "None of your concern, whatsoever! Impudence! Here in my office!"

Gersen spoke in a soft even voice. "The Tutelars will be interested in your illegal actions. I am puzzled that you choose to defy the law."

Masensen sat back, in puff-cheeked alarm. The Tutelars, of caste so elevated that the distinction between Masensen and his office-clerk would seem insignificant, were not to be trifled with. They were no respecters of

person they tended to believe the accusation rather than the protestation of innocence. They wore uniforms of a sumptuous thick pile which showed various sheens according to the light: plum, dark-green, gold. Not so much arrogant as intensely serious, they conducted themselves to the full implications of their caste. On Olliphane penal torture was administered as a cheaper, if not more effective, deterrent than fines or imprisonment; the threat of a police accusation could therefore bring consternation to the most innocent.

Director-Controller Masensen cried out, "I have never defied the law! Do I refuse your request? No, indeed!"

"Then furnish my key immediately, as the law requires."

"Softly, then," said Masensen. "We can not go so fast. There are records to inspect. Don't forget, we have more important affairs than leaping to serve ever raggle-taggle vagabond of a locator who marches into our room to insult us."

Gersen stared into the round, pale face, which gave back hostility and defiance. "Very well," said Gersen. "I will go to complain before the Board of Tutelars."

"Now then, be reasonable!" blurted Masensen in heavy af-

fability. "All things do not come at once."

"Where is my key? Do you still plan to defy the law?"

"Naturally, no such thing is possible. I will see to the matter. Come, be patient. Take a chair and compose yourself for just these few minutes."

"I do not care to wait."

"Go then!" bellowed Masensen. "I have done exactly as the law requires!" His lips were pushing in and out; his face was pink with fury; he hammered the desk with his fists. The clerk, standing horrified in the doorway, emitted a low wail of terror. "Bring the Tutelars!" raged Masensen. "I will accuse you of molestation and threats! I will see you whipped!"

Gersen turned, departed. He passed through the outer office, and out into the concrete tunnel. He paused, turned a quick look behind him. The receptionist, fluttering in excitement, paid him no heed. Gersen walked up the hall, away from the entrance, and presently came to an arched opening, giving upon the production chambers.

Standing to the side, inconspicuous in the shadow of a pillar, Gersen made a careful appraisal of the rooms, tracing the various production lines. Certain phases were under biomechanical control, others were

performed by debtors, moral deviants, vagrants or drunks, leased by the dozen from the city. They sat chained to their benches, guarded by an old warden, and worked with apathetic efficiency. The room supervisor sat on an elevated platform, which swung on a boom to any area of the room.

Gersen located the process where monitors were constructed, identified the area where locks were installed: an alcove two hundred feet along the wall, beside a cubicle where a clerical worker, perhaps a time-keeper, sat on a high chair.

He made a final survey of the room. No one had showed the slightest interest in him. The supervisor's attention was turned elsewhere.

He walked quickly along the wall to the cubicle where the clerk sat. The clerk was a harassed, hollow-cheeked, young-old man, with sardonic black eyebrows, a wrinkled, sallow skin, a cynical hook of nose and curl of mouth: a man not necessarily a pessimist, but apparently one without optimism. Gersen stepped to the back of the cubicle where there were shadows. The clerk looked around in astonishment. "Well, sir? What do you wish? This is not permitted."

Gersen asked, "Would you care to earn a hundred SVU—very quickly?"

The clerk grimaced sadly. "Of course. Who must I kill?"

"My wants are less demanding," said Gersen. He displayed the brass plate. "Get me the key for this instrument, and fifty SVU is yours." He placed five purple notes on the table. "Find out to whom the serial number is registered—fifty SVU more." He counted down the notes.

The clerk looked at the money, turned a speculative glance over his shoulder, out across the shop. "Why not go to the front office? The Director-Controller usually handles such things."

"I have irritated Director-Controller Masensen," said Gersen. "He makes difficulties, and I am in a hurry."

"In other words, Director-controller Masensen would not approve of my helping you."

"Which is why I offer you the hundred SVU to perform an entirely legal errand for me."

"Is it worth my job?"

"If I leave the back way no one need know. And Masensen will never know the difference."

The clerk considered. "Very well," he said. "I can do it. But I'll need another fifty SVU, for the key-maker."

Gersen shrugged, brought forth an orange fifty SVU note.

"I will appreciate haste."

The clerk laughed. "From my viewpoint the sooner you are gone, the better. I'll have to look through two sets of records. We're not too efficient here. Meanwhile keep to the back, out of sight." He noted the serial number, left the cubicle, disappeared behind a partition.

Time passed. Gersen noticed that the back wall was paneled with painted glass. Bending, he put his eye to a scratch and obtained a blurred view of the room behind the partition.

The clerk stood at an old-fashioned filing case, flipping cards. He found the file, made a set of notes. But now from a side door Masensen lumbered into the room. The clerk closed the file, walked away. Masensen stopped short, fired a question at the clerk, who responded with an indifferent word or two. Gersen paid silent tribute to his *sang-froid*. Masensen glared after him, then wheeled and went to the files.

With one eye on Masensen's burly back, the clerk bent over the key-maker, whispered in his ear, departed. Masensen looked around suspiciously, but the clerk had left the room.

The machinist dropped a key blank into the machine, consulted a paper, punched a set of buttons, to control the notches,

twists, conductivities and magnetic nodes of the key.

Masensen rummaged through the files, extracted a card, marched from the room. The clerk at once returned. The machinist tossed him the key; the clerk returned to the cubicle. He handed the key to Gersen, took five purple notes from the table.

"And the registration?" asked Gersen.

"I can't help you. Masensen got to the files ahead of me, and removed the card."

Gersen glumly considered the key. His main purpose had been to learn the registered owner of the monitor. The key of course was better than nothing. The record filament was easier to hide than the monitor itself. But time was short; he dared delay no longer. "Keep the other fifty," he said. The money, after all, had come from Grendel. "Buy your children a present."

The clerk shook his head. "I accept pay only for what I achieve. I need no gift."

"As you wish." Gersen returned the money to his pocket. "Tell me how to leave."

"You had better go the way you came," said the clerk. "If you try to go out the back way, you will be stopped by the patrol."

"Thank you," said Gersen. "You are not Olph?"

"No. But I've lived here so long I've forgotten anything better."

Gersen looked cautiously from the cubicle. The situation was as before. He slipped out, walked quickly along the wall to the arch, passed through into the concrete tunnel. Passing the door which led into the administration offices, he looked through, saw Masensen pacing back and forth, evidently in a vicious mood. Gersen stepped past, hurried down the hall toward the outside door.

But now this door opened. A man entered, his features dark against the outside light. Gersen continued forward briskly, confidently, as if his business were the most legitimate in the world.

The man approached; their eyes met. The newcomer stopped. It was Tristano the Earthman.

"Luck!" declared Tristano in a voice of hushed pleasure. "Luck indeed."

Gersen made no reply. Slowly, carefully, he sought to sidle past. Tristano took a step, blocked his way. Gersen halted, appraised him. Tristano was shorter than himself by an inch, but thick in the neck and shoulders, flat but rather wide at the hip: an attribute indicating agility and

good muscular leverage. His head was small, almost hairless; his features were neat. The ears were surgically cropped, the nose flat, the area around the mouth thick with muscle. His expression was calm, with a serene, secret half-smile twisting up the corners of his mouth. He seemed reckless rather than vicious: a man who would feel neither hate nor pity, a man driven only by the need to fulfill the extremes of his capabilities.

A highly dangerous man, thought Gersen. He said quietly, "Stand aside."

Tristano extended his left hand almost affably. "Whatever your name is, be wise. Come with me." Flicking and weaving the extended hand he leaned forward. Gersen watched Tristano's eyes, ignoring the distracting left hand. When the right hand darted forth he knocked it aside, drove his fist into Tristano's face.

Tristano reeled back, as if in desperate pain, and Gersen pretended to be deceived. He rushed forward, arm cocked back to administer another blow, then halted abruptly as with incredible agility Tristano swung up his leg: a kick intended to cripple or kill. As the foot swung by, Gersen seized toe and heel, twisted hard. Tristano, relaxing

instantly, turned in mid-air, pulled himself into a ball, used the momentum of his turn and fall to wrench the foot harmlessly from Gersen's grasp. He caught himself cat-like on hands and feet, started to bounce away, but Gersen caught the back of Tristano's head, yanked Tristano's face down against his knee. Cartilage crushed, teeth broke.

Tristano fell back, now startled. For an instant he sat laxly sprawl. Gersen caught Tristano's leg and ankle in a lock, threw over his weight, and felt the bone snap. Tristano sucked in his breath. Snatching for his knife, he left his throat exposed; Gersen hacked backhand at the larynx. Tristano's throat was well-muscled, and he retained consciousness, to fall back, feebly waving his knife. Gersen kicked it away, edged forward carefully, for Tristano might be equipped with one or a dozen secret built-in weapons.

"Leave me be," croaked Tristano. "Leave me be, go your way." He dragged himself to the wall.

Gersen cautiously reached forth, giving Tristano the option to counter. Tristano refused; Gersen made contact with the massive shoulders, gripped. Tristano suffered this. The two stared eye to eye. Tristano made a sudden grab for an arm-lock,

simultaneously bringing up his good leg. Gersen avoided the arm-lock, seized the leg, prepared to break the other ankle.

Behind him there was an outcry and a flurry of movement. Director-Controller Masensen, face contorted, came running awkwardly down the hall. Behind him trotted two or three underlings. "Stop this!" cried Masensen. "What do you do here, in this building?" He fairly spat in Gersen's face, "You are a devil, a criminal of the worst sort! You insult me, you attack my customer! I will have the Tutelars attend to you!"

"By all means," said Gersen. "Call the Tutelars."

Masensen raised his eyebrows. "What? You have this insolence, too?"

"No insolence is intended," said Gersen. "A good citizen assists the police in apprehending criminals."

"What do you mean?"

"There is a certain name which I need speak only once to the Tutelars. I need only hint that you and this person are in collusion. For proof? This man—" he looked down at the half-smiling, half-dazed Tristano — "do you know him?"

"No. Of course I do not know him."

"But you identified him as a customer?"

"So I thought him."
"He is a notorious murderer."
"Wrong, my agile friend,"
croaked Tristano. "No murderer
I."

"Lugo Teehalt is not alive to
contradict you."

Tristano essayed a grimace
of outraged innocence. "We
spoke, you and I, while the old
man died."

"In this case, neighbor Dasce
nor the Sarkoy killed Teehalt.
Who came with you to Smade's
Planet?"

"We came alone."

"I find this hard to believe.
Hildemar Dasce told Teehalt
that Grendel awaited him out-
side."

Tristano's response was a faint
shrug.

Gersen stood looking down at
him. "I respect the Tutelars and
their scourges. I dare not kill
you. But I can break more bones,
and you will walk sideways like
a crab. I can spread apart your
eyes, and you will look in two
different directions the rest of
your life."

The lines bracketing Tris-
tano's mouth became deep and
melancholy. He slumped heavily
back against the wall, disin-
terested, sodden with pain. He
mumbled, "And when is killing
beyond the Pale called murder?"

"Who killed Teehalt?"

"I saw nothing. I stood with
you, by the door."

"But the three of you came
together to Smade's."

Tristano made no response.
Gersen leaned forward, perform-
ed a quick vicious act. Masensen
made an inarticulate sound,
stumbled away, then halted as
if caught by a wire and slowly
turned once more to stare. Tris-
tano looked numbly at his dan-
gling hand.

"Who killed Teehalt?"

Tristano shook his head. "I
will say no more. I would rather
limp and squint than die of the
Sarkoy's cluthe."

"I can infect you with cluthe."

"I will say no more."

Gersen leaned forward, but
Masensen uttered a short quav-
ering cry. "This is intolerable!
I will not allow it! Must you
give me nightmares? I do not
sleep well."

Gersen examined him without
friendliness. "You would do well
not to interfere."

"I will call in the Tutelars.
Your acts are grossly illegal, you
have broken laws of the state."

Gersen laughed. "Call the Tu-
telars. We will learn who has
broken laws and who will be
punished."

Masensen rubbed his pallid
cheeks. "Go then. Never return,
and I will say no more."

"Not so fast," said Gersen.

"You are in serious difficulties.
I came here on a legal errand;
you telephone for a murderer,
who attacks me. This conduct no
one should ignore."

Masensen licked his lips.
"You are making false
charges. I will add this to my
particulars." It was a poor ef-
fort. Gersen laughed. He went to
Tristano, turned him over on his
face, pulled the jacket down the
broad back to constrict the arns,
tied it in place with Tristano's
sash. With his broken ankle Tris-
tano was now immobilized.

Gersen stepped down the hall,
motioned to Masensen. "Let us
go to your office."

Gersen led the way, with Mas-
ensen stumping reluctantly be-
hind; once in the office Masen-
sen sank into his chair.

"Now then," said Gersen.
"Call the Tutelars."

Masensen shook his head. "It
— it is better to make no diffi-
culties. The Tutelars are some-
times unreasonable."

"In that case you must tell me
what I want to know."

Masensen bowed his head.
"Ask."

"Who did you telephone when
I appeared?"

Masensen showed extreme agi-
tation. "I cannot tell you," he
said huskily. "Do you insist that
I be killed?"

"The Tutelars will ask the
same question, as well as many
others."

Masensen looked in anguish to
right, left, up at the ceiling. "A
man," he said, "at the Grand
Pomador Hotel. His name —
Spock."

"I know better," said Gersen.
"You are lying. I give you one
more chance. Who did you
call?"

Masensen shook his head
desperately. "I do not lie."

"Have you seen the man?"

"Yes. He is tall. He has short
pink hair, a long big head and
no neck. His face is a peculiar
red color, and he wears dark
spectacles, and a nose-guard —
very unusual. He has no more
feeling than a fish."

Gersen nodded. Masensen was
telling the truth. This would be
Hildemar Dasce.

He turned. "Now then, this is
most important. I wish to know
to whom the monitor is regis-
tered."

Masensen started to shake his
head, then gave a fatalistic shrug
and rose to his feet. "I will go
for the record."

"No," said Gersen. "We will
go together. And if we cannot
find the record, I swear to you, I
will lodge the strongest possible
charges."

Masensen rubbed his fore-
head wearily. "I remember now.

The record is here." He brought forth a card from his desk. "Sea Province University, Avente, Alphanor. Beneficial Grant 291."

"No name?"

"No. And there is no value to you in the key. The University uses a coder in each of its monitors. We have sold them several."

"Indeed." The use of a coder, to thwart the double-dealing of an unscrupulous locator, was common enough.

Masensen's voice became heavily ironic. "The University has evidently sold you a coded monitor without the scrambling strip. If I were you I would complain to the Avente authorities."

Gersen considered the implications of the information. They were far-reaching indeed, if one certain condition was met.

"Why did you telephone the man Spock? Did he offer you money?"

Masensen nodded miserably. "Money. And — he made threats. An indiscretion of my past—" He made a vague gesture.

"Tell me, did Spock realize that the monitor was coded?"

"Certainly. I mentioned this to him, but he was already aware of it."

Gersen nodded. The condition had been met. Grendel must necessarily have access to the de-

scrambling strip at the Sea Province University.

He reflected a moment. Information was accumulating. Grendel himself had killed Teehalt, if Hildemar Dasce were to be believed. Tristano indirectly had verified this. He had conveyed more information than he meant. He had also confused the situation. If Dasce, the Sarkoy poisoner and Tristano had come together, with no fourth person, how was the presence of Grendel to be explained? Had he arrived simultaneously in another ship? Possible, but unlikely... Masensen was staring at him anxiously, miserably. "I'm going now," said Gersen. "Do you plan to tell this Spock that I was here?"

Masensen nodded, all his bluster departed. "I must."

"But you will wait one hour."

Masensen made no protest. He might or might not respect Gersen's wishes. Most likely not. But there was no help for this. Gersen turned and departed the office, leaving Masensen utterly deflated.

Walking down the hall, Gersen overtook Tristano who somehow had managed to squirm and writhe himself erect. Now he hopped down the hall, one foot dragging at a queer angle. He looked over his shoulder at Gersen, still wearing the quiet half-smile, though the muscles

around his mouth were tight. Gersen stopped to consider the man. It would be wise and desirable to kill him, except for

the possibility of police interference. So, contenting himself with a polite nod and stepping past Tristano, he went his way.

VI

Preface to *Men of the Oikumenē*, by Jan Holberk Vaenz
LXII

There is a stifling quality to his age which has been observed, remarked and lamented by a number of the contemporary anthropologists: a curious paradox, for never before have such variegated opportunities and possible channels of life existed.

The most important fact of human life is the infinity of space: the bounds which can never be reached, the worlds without number still unseen. In short, the Beyond. It is my belief that the awareness of these awesome possibilities have somehow clotted at the core of human consciousness, and have diminished or dampened human enterprise.

An instant qualification is necessary. Men of enterprise indeed exist, though sadly enough most of them work Beyond, and their enterprise is not entirely constructive. (The statement is not completely ironical: many of the most noxious forms of life exert some sort of useful side-effect.)

But, in general, ambition is turned inward, rather than out toward the obvious goals. Why? Does infinity, as an object of experience instead of a mathematical abstraction, daunt the human mind? Are we complacent and secure, knowing that the riches of the galaxy are always there for the taking? Is contemporary life already sated by too rich a diet of novelty? Is it conceivable that the Institute wields more control over the human psyche than we suspect? Or is there current a feeling of frustration and staleness, the conviction that all glory has been won, that all the meaningful goals have been achieved?

Undoubtedly there is no single answer. But several points are noteworthy. First (to be mentioned without comment) is the peculiar situation where the most influential and effective systems of the day are the private, or at best semi-public, associations: the IPCC, the Institute, the Jarnell Corporation.

Second is the decline of the general level of education. The extremes are certainly farther

apart; the savants of the Institute on the one hand, and, say, the serfs of a Tertullian estate on the other. If we consider the condition of men beyond the Pale, the polarity is even more pronounced. There are obvious sources to the decline. Pioneers settling in strange and often hostile environments have sheer survival for their first concern. Possibly even more daunting is the unmanageable mass of accumulated knowledge. The trend toward specialization began with modern times, but after the break-out into space, and the consequent new amplitude of information, specialization has become even more narrowly focused.

It is perhaps pertinent to consider the manner of man who has become the new specialist. He lives in a materialistic age, where comparatively small interest is given to absolutes. He is a man of charm, wit, sophistication, but no profundity. His ideals are not abstract. His field of endeavor, if he is a scholar, may be mathematics or one of the physical sciences; but a hundred times more likely will be a phase of what loosely are called humanistic studies: history, sociology, comparatives, symbology, esthetics, anthropology, the varieties of experience, penology, education, communi-

cation, administration and coercion, not to mention the morass of psychology already trampled by generations of incompetents, and the still unexplored wilderness of psionics.

There are also those who, like the author, ensconce themselves on a thunderous crag of omniscience and, with protestations of humility which are either unconvincing or totally absent, assume the obligation of appraisal, commendation, derogation or denunciation of their contemporaries. Still, by and large it is an easier job than digging a ditch.

From *Ten Explorers: A Study of a Type*, by Oscar Anderson:

Every world has its distinctive psychic aroma: this is a matter attested to by each of the ten explorers. Isack Canaday is willing to wager that if blindfolded and taken to any planet of the Oikumene or the immediate Beyond, he will correctly identify this planet immediately upon removal of the blindfold. How does he perform such a feat? At first glance it seems incomprehensible. Canaday himself professes not to know the source of his knowledge. "I just raise my nose, I look around the sky, I take a couple jumps—and it comes to me."

Canaday's explanation is of

course arch and consciously quaint. Our senses are undoubtedly much more acute than we suspect. The composition of the air, the color of the light and the sky, the curvature and proximity of the horizon, the tension of gravity: these are presumably interpreted in our brains to produce an individuality, exactly as the sight of eyes, a nose, hair, a mouth, ears, creates the look of a face.

All of this without mention of flora and fauna, the artifices of autochthone or man, the possibly distinctive look of sun or suns...

From *Life*, Volume III, by Unspiek, Baron Bodissey:

As a society matures the struggle for survival imperceptibly graduates and changes emphasis, and becomes what can only be termed the quest for pleasure. This is a large statement, possibly of no startling novelty. Nevertheless, as a generality, it affords a rich resonance of implications. The author suggests as a lively topic for a dissertation a survey of various environment-survival situations and the special types of pleasure-goals deriving therefrom. It seems probable, from a moment's reflection, that every particular scarcity or compulsion or danger generates a corresponding psychic tension

demanding a particular gratification.

Gersen returned to the subway terminal at Sansontiana. He recovered the monitor and immediately made a trial of the key. To his gratification the lock moved smoothly. The case slid open.

There was neither explosive nor acid present. He extracted the little cylinder containing the filament and weighed it in his hand. Then he stepped into a post-office booth and mailed the cylinder to himself, at the Hotel Credenza, Avente, Alphanor. He rode the subway back to Kindune and the space-port, and with no untoward incident took his ship aloft.

The blue crescent of Alphanor presently bulged across the sky, with Rigel dazzling beyond. When the seven continents began to emerge from the dark, Gersen engaged his auto-pilot into the Avente landing program, and so was guided down to the space-port. The crane lifted the boat, carried it to a storage bay. Gersen emerged and made a cautious reconnaissance.

Finding no evidence of his enemies, he proceeded down the ranks of stored space-craft to the terminal building. Here he breakfasted and considered his plans. They were, he decided,

completely straightforward, deriving from a progression of logical steps in which he could see no flaw:

- a. Lugo Teehalt's monitor was registered to the Sea Province University.
- b. The information on the monitor filament was coded, accessible only upon application of the decoding, or descrambling, strip.
- c. The decoding strip was in possession of the Sea Province University at Avente.
- d.
 1. According to Lugo Teehalt, Grendel had been his original sponsor. (A fact he had apparently understood for the first time at Brinktown. Indiscretions by Hildemar Dase? Everything considered, Grendel probably still regarded his incognito secure.)
 2. Grendel vigorously sought possession of the monitor and its filament, and hence must have access to the decoding strip.
- f. Gersen's course of action would therefore be:
 1. Identify the persons who had access to the decoding strip.
 2. Learn which of these fulfilled a set of conditions

consistent with the identity and activities of Grendel. Which, for example, had been gone long enough for a visit to Smade's Planet?

A straightforward and logical line of attack indeed. But, Gersen reflected, the implementation of his logic might not be quite so easy. He dare not arouse Grendel's apprehensions. To a certain extent, possession of Teehalt's filament provided security. However, if Grendel felt a personal threat, and no qualms in arranging an assassination. To this moment, Grendel had no reason to fear exposure, and it would be foolhardy to convince him otherwise. The initiative, for the present, was his; there was no occasion for break-neck haste.

His attention became distracted. In a booth nearby sat a pair of pretty girls who evidently had come to the terminal to welcome a friend, or to see one off. Gersen contemplated them wistfully, aware, not for the first time, of an empty area in his life. Frivolity...

The two girls evidently had very little else on their minds. One had dyed her hair forest green and toned her skin a delicate lettuce green. The other wore a wig of lavender metal

shavings with dead-white skin-toning; an elaborate cloche of silver leaves and tendrils clung to her forehead and clasped her cheeks.

Gersen drew a deep breath. Undoubtedly he had lived a grim cheerless existence. Thinking back across the years, scenes came crowding into his mind, all of which were variations on a single theme: other children occupied with irresponsible pleasure, while he, a rather thin boy with a grave face, watched from a distance. He had felt only interest and wonder at the easy gaiety — so he recalled — never relating the scenes to himself. His grandfather had seen to that.

One of the girls at the nearby booth had noticed his attention; she whispered to her friend. Both glanced across the aisle, then ostentatiously ignored him. Gersen smiled ruefully. He felt no confidence in his dealings with women; he had known few intimately. He frowned, turned the two a wary side-glance. Not impossibly Grendel had sent these girls to beguile him... Ridiculous. Why two?

They rose and departed the restaurant, each turning him one swift covert glance.

Gersen watched their retreat, resisting the sudden urge to run after them, to introduce himself, to make them his friends... Ri-

diculous again, doubly ridiculous. What would he say? He pictured the two pretty faces at first puzzled, then embarrassed, while he stood making lame efforts to ingratiate himself... The girls were gone.

Just as well, thought Gersen, half-amused, half-angry with himself. Still, why deceive himself? Living the life of half a man was difficult, a source of dissatisfaction. The circumstances of his life had given him small command of the social graces. Still, what of that? He knew his mission in life, and he was superbly prepared to fulfill this mission. He had no doubts, no uncertainties; his goals were exactly defined.

A sudden idea disturbed the flow of his self-reassurances: where would he be without this clear purpose? If he were less artificially motivated, he might not show so well in comparison with the easy men around him, with their pleasant manners and fluent talk.

Turning the thought over, back and forth, Gersen began to feel spiritually deficient. No phase to his life had occurred by his own free choice. He felt no slightest tremor in his dedication: this was not the point at issue. But, he thought, a man's goals should not be imposed up-

on him until he knew enough of the world to make his own survey, to weigh his own decisions.

He had not been given this option. The decision had been made, he had accepted it... After all, what matter? More to the point, what would he do when and if he succeeded in his aims?

The chances were small, of course. But — assuming the death of five men — what then would he do with his life? Once or twice before he had reached this point in his reflections. Warned by some subconscious signal, he had never gone beyond it. Nor did he do so now.

His breakfast was finished; the girls, who had prompted him to his brooding, had taken themselves off. Evidently they were not agents of Grendel the Monster.

Gersen sat a few minutes longer considering the best approach to his problem, and again decided upon simple directness.

He went to a communication booth and was connected to the Information Bureau at the Sea Province University in the suburb of Remo, ten miles south.

The telescreen flickered first with the university seal, then a conventional reception presentation, printed with the words Please speak clearly. Simultaneously a recorded voice asked,

"How may we serve you?"

Gersen spoke to the still unseen receptionist. "I want information regarding the university's exploration program. Which department is directly concerned?"

The screen clarified through a decorative cross-hatching, to show the gold-toned face of a young woman with blonde hair in flamboyant puffs at each ear. "That depends on the type of exploration."

"It would be connected with Beneficial Grant 291."

"Just a moment, sir, and I'll inquire." The scene retreated behind the cross-hatching.

Presently the girl's face reappeared. "I'll connect you with the Department of Galactic Morphology, sir."

Gersen looked into another pale receptionist face. This young woman had an arch piquant face toned nacreous silver, and wore her hair in a dark nimbus of ten thousand tiny varnished spikes. "Galactic Morph."

"I want to inquire about Beneficial Grant 291," said Gersen.

The girl considered a moment. "You mean the grant itself, sir?"

"The grant, how it operates, who administers it."

The arch young face pursed its mouth dubiously. "There's not much I can tell you, sir. It's

the fund which finances our exploration program."

"I'm particularly interested in a locator named Lugo Teehalt, who worked under the grant."

She shook her head. "I wouldn't know anything about him. Mr. Detteras could tell you, but he's not available for appointments today."

"Mr. Detteras hires the locators?"

The girl twisted her eyebrows, squinted; she had a mobile expression, a wide mouth with a merry upward twitch at the corners. Gersen watched her in fascination. "I don't know too much about things like that, sir. We have our part in the Master Exploration Program, of course. That's not under Grant 291, though. Mr. Detteras is Director of Exploration; he could tell you whatever you wanted to know."

"Is there anyone else in the department who might sponsor a locator on Grant 291?"

The girl looked speculatively sidewise at Gersen, wondering as to the nature of his interest. "Are you a police official?" she asked timidly.

Gersen laughed. "No. I'm a friend of Mr. Teehalt's, trying to finish up some business for him."

"Oh. Well, there's Mr. Kelle,

who is Chairman of the Research Planning Committee. And Mr. Warweave, the Honorary Provost, who made the donation for Grant 291. Mr. Kelle is gone for the morning; his daughter is marrying tomorrow and he's very busy."

"What about Mr. Warweave? Can I see him?"

"Well—" The girl pursed her lips, bent her head over an appointment panel. "He's busy until three, and then he keeps an open hour, for students or persons without appointments."

"That would suit me very well."

"If you'd care to leave your name," said the girl demurely, "I'll put it at the head of the list. Then you won't have to wait, in case there are lots of others."

Gersen was startled by her solicitude. He searched her face, and was further surprised to find her smiling at him. "That's very kind of you," he said. "My name is Kirth Gersen."

He watched her write. She seemed in no hurry to terminate the conversation. He asked, "What does an Honorary Provost do?"

She shrugged. "I don't know, really. He comes and goes. I think he does just what he wants. Anyone who is rich does just what he wants. Wait till I'm rich!"

"One more thing," Gersen said. "Are you familiar with the routine of the department?"

"Why, yes, I should say so." The girl laughed. "Insofar as there is a routine."

"The recording filament of the monitor in a locator boat is coded. You're aware of this?"

"So I have been told." The girl was definitely speaking to Gersen as an individual, rather than a face on a screen. Gersen thought her deliciously pretty, in spite of her rather extravagant hair style. Definitely he had been in space too long. He kept his voice even with an effort. "Who unscrambles the filaments? Who is in charge of the code?"

Again the girl was doubtful. "Mr. Detteras for one. Perhaps Mr. Kelle."

"Can you find out definitely?"

The girl hesitated, examining Gersen's face. It was always wise to refuse to answer questions whose motives she could not fathom. Still — where could be the harm? The man who inquired seemed interesting. Wistful and sad, she thought, and a trifle mysterious... and definitely not unattractive, after a plain hard-bitten fashion. "I can ask Mr. Detteras' secretary," she said brightly. "Will you wait?"

The screen dimmed, and a

minute or two later brightened again. The girl smiled back at Gersen. "I was right. Mr. Detteras, and Mr. Keller and Mr. Warweave — these are the only people who have access to the decoding strip."

"I see. Mr. Detteras is Director of Exploration, Mr. Kelle is Chairman of the Research Planning Committee, and Mr. Warweave is — what?"

"Honorary Provost. They gave him the title when he endowed the department with Grant 291. He's a very wealthy man, and very interested in space exploration. He frequently goes Beyond. Have you ever been Beyond?"

"I've just returned."

She leaned forward, her face alive with interest. "Is it really as wild and dangerous as everyone says?"

Gersen threw caution to the winds, with a bravado that startled even himself. "Come out with me and see for yourself."

The girl did not appear unduly perturbed. But she shook her head. "I'd be alarmed. I've been taught never to trust strange men from the Beyond. You might be a slaver and sell me."

"Such things have happened," said Gersen. "You're probably safer where you are."

"Still," she said coquettishly, "who wants to be safe?"

Gersen hesitated, started to speak, stopped short. The girl watched him with an expression of bland innocence. Well, why not? Gersen asked himself. His grandfather had been old and parched... "In that case — if you're willing to risk it — perhaps you'd spend the evening with me."

"For what purpose?" The girl was suddenly demure. "Slavery?"

"No. Just — the usual. What ever you'd like to do."

"This is very abrupt. After all, I haven't even seen you face to face."

"Yes, you're right," said Gersen, abashed. "I'm not very galandant."

"And still, what could be the harm? I'm impulsive myself, or so I've been told."

"I suppose it depends on circumstances."

"You're just in from Beyond," the girl said magnanimously. "So I guess you can be excused."

"Then you'll do it?"

She pretended to consider. "Very well. I'll take a chance. Where will I meet you?"

"I'll be out at three o'clock to see Mr. Warweave. We can make arrangements then."

"I'm off duty at four. You're sure you're not a slaver?"

"I'm not even a pirate."

"Rather an unenterprising sort, I'd say. But I'm just as pleased,

until I know you a little better."

A wide sandy beach extended a hundred miles south of Avente, around the entire concavity of Ard Hook. As far as Remo, and a few miles beyond, villas built of glaring white coquina lined the crest of the sandy bluffs which overlooked the ocean.

Gersen hired a small surface-slender and skidded south over the broad white turnpike, the inevitable dust puffing up behind him. For a space the road followed the shore. Sand dazzled under the brilliant Rigel-light; blue water under a collar of white foam sparkled and rolled calmly up and down the sand, creating a sound invariable on every other world in every other galaxy where surf meets shore. The road presently climbed the bluffs. To the left spread sand-dunes overgrown with black and purple iron-bush, punctuated by tall white balloon-flower, the inflated pod floating at the end of a long stem. Other white villas looked forth from groves of cool green deodars, native feather-tree, hybrid palm.

Ahead the ground rose, the sandy bluffs became a range of low hills, presenting a steep face to the ocean. Remo occupied the flat land at the foot of one of these hills. A pair of piers termi-

nating in high-domed casinos reached forth to create a harbor filled with small boats. The university occupied the crest of the hill, a series of low flat-roofed structures connected by arcades.

Gersen arrived at the campus parking-area, lowered the slide-car and alighted. A slideway took him through a commemorative arch into a wide mall, where he inquired directions from a student.

"The College of Galactic Morphology? Into the next quad, sir; at the far corner."

Ruefully pondering the respectful "sir" from a man no more than seven years his junior, Gersen walked to the end of the mall, threading a many-voiced, many-costumed multitude of students. He crossed the quadrangle and approached the building at the far corner. At the portal he paused, aware of an emotion strangely like diffidence, or shyness, which had gradually been asserting itself during the entire trip out to the university. He jeered at himself. Was he a schoolboy, that the prospect of an evening with a strange girl should give him tremors? And more remarkable, the emotion seemed to take precedence over the basic goal of his existence! He shrugged, irritated and amused together, then entered the foyer.

At a desk a girl looked up, with an uncertainty Gersen identified as equivalent to his own. She was smaller and more slender than he had thought her to be, but by no means less appealing. "Mr. Gersen?"

Gersen put on what he hoped was a reassuring mile. "It occurs to me that I don't know your name."

She relaxed a trifle. "Pallis Atwrode."

"That takes care of the formalities," said Gersen. "I hope that our arrangement is still working?"

She nodded. "Unless you've changed your mind."

"No."

"I act far bolder than I actually am," said Pallis Atwrode. She gave an embarrassed laugh. "I've simply decided to ignore my upbringing. My mother is a blue-stocking. Perhaps it's time I began to overcompensate."

"You begin to alarm me," said Gersen. "I'm not very bold either, and if I have to cope with overcompensation—"

"Not really formidable overcompensation. I won't become intoxicated, or pick a fight, or—"

She stopped.

"Or?"

"Oh — just 'or'."

Gersen looked at his watch. "I'd better see Mr. Warweave."

"His offices are down that corridor. And Mr. Gersen—"

Gersen looked down into the unperturbed face. "Yes?"

"Today I told you something which it seems I shouldn't have. About the code. It's supposed to be secret. Would you please not mention it to Mr. Warweave? I'd get in trouble."

"I'll say nothing about it."

"Thank you."

He went off down the corridor she had indicated. The floor was resilient black and gray tesserae; the walls and ceiling were plastered white, devoid of decoration or relief except for the various doors and identifiers — these in various muted tones of maroon, mauve, dark green, indigo.

Three doors along the corridor Gersen came upon a free-floating identifier of luminous blue letters, which read: GYLE WARWEAVE, and below: PROVOST.

He paused, struck by the incongruity of Grendel the Monster in such surroundings. Was there a break in his chain of reasoning? The monitor was coded, registered to the university. Hildemar Dasce, Grendel's lieutenant, had sought possession of the filament, which was useless without the decoder. Gyle Warweave, Detteras and Kelle were the three men who had ac-

cess to the decoder; one of the three must be Grendel. So then: which? Warweave, Detteras or Kelle?

Conjecture without facts was useless; he must deal with events as they occurred. He stepped forward. The door slipped aside, quick as a camera shutter; the identifier broke into individual letters which scattered like frightened fish, to regroup after he had passed.

In the outer office a tall thin, middle-aged woman with keen, unsympathetic gray eyes stood listening to an obviously unhappy young man, shaking her head slowly as he spoke.

"I'm sorry," she said finally, in a clear brittle voice. "These arrangements are all made on a formal basis of student achievement. I can't allow you to bother the provost with your complaints."

"What is he there for, then?" shouted the young man. "He has open office hours, why can't he listen to my side of the story?"

The woman shook her head. "I'm sorry." She turned away. "Are you Mr. Gersen?" she asked.

Gersen came forward.

"Mr. Warweave is expecting you; please go through that door."

Gersen went as directed. Gyle Warweave, sitting at a desk rose to his feet as Gersen entered: a tall handsome man, strong and fit looking, of an age not immediately obvious—perhaps ten or fifteen years older than Gersen. His hair was a cushion of black curls shaped close to his skull, his skin-dye a conservative pale umber. His face was emphatically marked; the eyes narrow, deep-set, black and brooding; the nose and chin harsh. He saluted Gersen with a measured courtesy.

"Mr. Gersen, sit down, if you will. I'm glad to make your acquaintance."

"Thank you." Gersen looked about him. The room was larger than the usual office. The desk occupied an unconventional position by the left of the door, with the greater part of room beyond. Tall windows at the right overlooked the quadrangle. The opposite wall was papered with hundreds of Mercator-projection maps of many worlds. The center of the room was empty, giving it the semblance of a conference chamber from which the table had been removed.

At the far end, on a pedestal of polished wood, stood a construction of stone and metal spires, the provenance of which Gersen was ignorant. He seated himself and returned his atten-

tion to the man behind the desk.

Gyle Warweave hardly conformed to Gersen's picture of the typical university administrator. This of course would well be true, thought Gersen, if Warweave were Grendel. Contradicting the evidence of his conservative skin-dye, Warweave wore a rich bright blue suit with a white sash, white leather greaves, pale blue sandals; garments which might be affected by a young buck of Sailmaker Beach district, north of Avente... Gersen groped at an elusive familiarity, a tantalizing wisp of recollection, which fled completely from view.

Warweave inspected Gersen with a similar frank curiosity, in which there was a trace of condescension.

Gersen definitely was no dandy. He wore the neutral garments of a person either uninterested in current modes or unaware of them. His skin was undyed (walking along the streets of Avente Gersen had felt almost undressed); his thick dark hair was cropped into an undistinguished ruff.

Warweave waited with tentative politeness. Gersen said, "I'm here, Mr. Warweave, in connection with a rather complex matter. My motives are beside the point, so I'll ask you to

listen without troubling about them."

Warweave nodded. "Rather difficult, but I'll try."

"First of all, are you acquainted with Mr. Lugo Teehalt?"

"No, I am not." The answer was immediate and decisive.

"May I ask who has the responsibility for the university's space exploration program?"

Warweave considered. "Do you refer to major expeditions, shotgun surveys, or what?"

"Whatever program makes use of locaters in leased boats."

"Hm," said Warweave. He turned a quizzical look toward Gersen. "By any chance, are you a locater in search of a post? If so—"

Gersen smiled politely. "No, I'm not after a job."

Warweave smiled in his turn, a quick humorless grimace. "No, of course not. I'm inept in my judgments. For instance, your voice tells me very little. You're not a native of the Concourse. If you were of a different physiognomy I'd place you from Mizar's Third."

"During most of my youth I lived on Earth."

"Indeed?" Warweave raised his eyebrows in manufactured astonishment. "Out here, you know, we think of Earthmen in terms of stereotypes: cultists, mystics, hyper-civilized epi-

cenies, sinister old men in Institute black, decadent aristocrats..."

"I claim no particular niche," said Gersen. "Incidentally, you puzzle me no less than I puzzle you."

Warweave put on an expression of rueful whimsy. "Very well, Mr. Gersen. You were asking about our policy in connection with locaters. First of all, we cooperate with a number of other institutions in the Master Space Exploration Program. Secondly, there is a small fund which may be drawn upon to expedite some special project."

"That is Beneficial Grant 291?"

Warweave inclined his head in curt assent.

"Very odd," said Gersen.

"Odd? How so?"

"Lugo Teehalt was a locater. The monitor in his boat was chartered to Sea Province University, under Grant 291."

Warweave pursed his lips. "It's quite possible that Mr. Teehalt might be working for one of the department heads on some special project."

"The monitor was coded. That should narrow the possibilities."

Warweave pierced Gersen with a hard glance of black eyes. "If I knew what you wanted to learn, I could answer more to the point."

There was nothing to lose by telling at least part of the truth, thought Gersen. If Gyle Warweave were Grendel, he would know what had happened. If he were not, no harm could be done. "The name Grendel is familiar to you?"

"Grendel the Monster? One of the so-called Demon Princes."

"Lugo Teehalt located a world of apparently idyllic conditions — a world literally beyond value, more Earthlike than Earth. Grendel learned of the discovery, how I don't know. In any event, at least four of Grendel's men hunted Teehalt to Smade's Tavern.

"Teehalt arrived just after I did. He landed in a hidden valley and walked to the tavern. During the evening Grendel's men arrived. Teehalt tried to escape, but they caught him in the dark, killed him. Then they took off in my ship, apparently assuming that it was Teehalt's. Both were the same, old Model 9B." Gersen laughed. "When they checked my monitor they had a sorry surprise.

"The next day I left in Teehalt's boat. Naturally I took possession of his monitor. I plan to sell the filament for as much as the market will bear."

Warweave nodded briskly, moved a sheet of paper on his desk an inch to the right. Gersen

watched him, studying the immaculate hands, the glossy fingernails. Looking up he caught the stare of Warweave's gaze, less affable than his tone of voice. "And from whom do you propose to collect?"

Gersen shrugged. I'll give Teehalt's sponsor the first opportunity. As I mentioned, the filament is coded, and is valueless without the decoding strip."

Warweave leaned back in his chair. "Offhand, I don't know who might have contracted with this man Teehalt. Whoever it is naturally would not buy a pig in a poke."

"Naturally not." Gersen placed a photograph on the desk. Warweave glanced at it, dropped it into a projection slot. A screen on the far wall burst into color.

Teehalt had taken the picture from a rise of ground to one side of a valley. On either hand hills rolled back, over, away and beyond. The rounded tips could be seen receding into the distance. Groves of tall dark trees stood to the side of the valley; a river wandered through the meadows, the banks lined with rushes. At the far side of the meadow, almost in the shade of the forest, stood what appeared to be a bank of flowering shrubs. The sunlight was golden-white, warm, languid, and the time was evidently noon.

Warweave studied the picture at length, then made a gruff, noncommittal sound. Gersen provided another photograph. The screen shifted to display the view down the valley: the river meandering and twisting, finally disappearing into the far distance. Trees standing tall at either side formed a sort of aisle, diminishing until all faded into haze.

Warweave heaved a sigh. "Beyond question a beautiful world. A hospitable world. What of atmosphere and biogens?"

"Completely compatible, according to Teehalt."

"If it is as you say — undiscovered, uninhabited — an independent locator could name his own price. Still, not being born yesterday, I wonder, could not this photograph have been made elsewhere? Even on Earth, where the vegetation is similar to this?"

For answer Gersen brought forth a third photograph. Warweave dropped it into the slot. The screen depicted, as if from a distance of twenty feet, one of the objects which in the first photograph had appeared as a flowering shrub. It was revealed as a perambulatory being, semi-humanoid, graceful. Slender gray legs supported a gray, silver,

blue, green torso. Purple-green eyes looked forth from a perfect ovoid head, which was otherwise featureless. From the shoulders, arm-like members reached three feet into the air, branching and webbing, to support the peacock's tail fan of fronds.

"The creature, whatever it is —"

"Teehalt called it a dryad."

"— certainly it is unique. I've never seen its like before. If the picture is not faked — and I do not believe that it is — then the planet is what you claim it to be."

"I claim nothing. Teehalt made the claims. It is a world — so he told me — so beautiful that he could neither bear to stay nor bear to leave."

"And you have Teehalt's filament in your possession."

"Yes. I want to sell it. The market is presumably limited to those persons who have access to the decoding strip. Of these, the man who sponsored Lugo Teehalt's operation should have the first option."

Warweave gave Gersen a long steady inspection. "A quixotic attitude, which puzzles me. You do not seem a quixotic man."

"Why not judge from deeds rather than impressions?"

Warweave merely raised his eyebrows in something like disdain. Then he said, "Conceivably

I could make you an offer for the filament: say two thousand SVU now, another ten thousand after inspection of the world. Possibly a trifle more."

"Naturally I will take the best price I can get," said Gersen. "But I would like to interview Mr. Kelle and Mr. Detteras first. One of them must be Teehalt's sponsor. If neither is interested in the filament, then—"

Warweave interrupted sharply. "Why do you specify these two men?"

"Other than yourself, they are the only persons who have access to the decoding strips."

"May I ask how you are aware of this?"

Remembering Pallis Atwrode's request, Gersen felt a pang of guilt. "I asked a young man in the quadrangle. Apparently it's common knowledge."

"Altogether too much loose talk," said Warweave, his mouth in a hard angry line.

Gersen wanted to inquire how Warweave had spent the previous month, but the occasion was clearly inopportune. It could not be a wise question, if posed directly: if Warweave were Grendel, his suspicion would instantly be reinforced.

Warweave now tapped fingers on his desk, rose to his feet. "If you will give half an hour I will

ask Mr. Detteras and Mr. Kelle to step into my office, and you can make your inquiry. Will that be satisfactory?"

"No."

"'No?'" barked Warweave. "Why not?"

Gersen also rose to his feet. "Since the matter does not concern you, I would prefer to interview Mr. Kelle and Mr. Detteras alone, on my own terms."

"This is at your option," said Warweave coldly. He considered a moment. "What you are after, I can't guess. I put little faith in your candor. But I will make a bargain with you."

Gersen waited.

"Kelle and Detteras are busy men," said Warweave. "They are not as accessible as I am. I will arrange that you see them at once—today, if you like. Possibly one or the other will admit to an arrangement with Lugo Teehalt. In any case, after your interview with Kelle and Detteras, you will report to me what offers, if any, they have made, and so give me the opportunity of meeting or exceeding the offer."

"In other words," said Gersen, "you'd keep this world for your private use?"

"Why not? The filament is no longer the property of the university. You have taken possession of it. And, if the truth be

known, my money has gone to endow Grant 291."

"That's reasonable enough."

"You agree to my bargain, then?"

"Yes. So long as you understand that the first refusal goes to Teehalt's sponsor."

Warweave's eyelids drooped. "I wonder why you insist on this."

"Perhaps I am a quixotic man after all, Mr. Warweave."

Warweave swung about, spoke into the desk-screen, listened, turned back to Gersen. "Very well. Mr. Kelle will see you first, then Mr. Detteras. After which, you will report back to me."

"I agree."

"Good. You will find Kelle's office at the opposite end of the building."

Gersen went out into the corridor past Warweave's glint-eyed secretary, returned to the foyer. Pallis Atwrode looked up with an eager expectancy Gersen found very appealing. "Did you learn what you wanted to?"

"No. He's sending me to see Kelle and Detteras."

"Today?"

"Right now."

She looked at him with new interest. "You'd be surprised at the people both Mr. Kelle and Mr. Detteras have refused to see today."

Gersen grinned. "I don't know how long I'll be... If you're off duty at four—"

"I'll wait," said Pallis Atwrode, and then she laughed. "I mean, you won't be very much longer than four, and I'd have to walk home, and explain where I live—and it's just easier waiting."

"I'll be as fast as I can," said Gersen. He left to prepare for his encounter with the Star King, feeling an unwonted sense of pleasure but he did not keep it long. Two thoughts obtruded in his mind and destroyed it for him.

Did he dare involve this girl in his struggle with a cruel and inhuman enemy?

Did he dare risk any distraction of his own purpose, in the face of this resourceful and devastating foe?

TO BE CONCLUDED



THE BIG PAT BOOM

by DAMON KNIGHT

ILLUSTRATED BY VAN DONGEN

*This couldn't happen, of course.
People don't act this way. All
of recorded history proves this
point . . . one way or the other!*

The long, shiny car pulled up with a whirr of turbines and a puff of dust. The sign over the roadside stand read: **BASKETS. CURIOS.**" Farther down, another sign over a glass-fronted rustic building announced: **SQUIRE CRAWFORD'S COFFEE MILL. TRY OUR DOUGHNUTS.**" Beyond that was a pasture, with a barn and silo set back from the road.

The two aliens sat quietly and looked at the signs. They both had hard purplish skins and lit-

tle yellow eyes. They were wearing gray tweed suits. Their bodies looked approximately human, but you could not see their chins, which were covered by orange scarves.

Martha Crawford came hustling out of the house and into the basket stand, drying her hands on her apron. After her came Llewellyn Crawford, her husband, still chewing his cornflakes.

"Yes, sir — ma'am?" Martha asked nervously. She glanced at



Llewellyn for support, and he patted her shoulder. Neither of them had ever seen an alien real close to.

One of the aliens, seeing the Crawfords behind their counter, leisurely got out of the car. He, or it, was puffing a cigar stuck through a hole in the orange scarf.

"Good morning," Mrs. Crawford said nervously. "Baskets? Curios?"

The alien blinked its yellow eyes solemnly. The rest of its face did not change. The scarf hid its chin and mouth, if any. Some said that the aliens had no chins, others that they had something instead of chins that was so squirmy and awful that no human could bear to look at it. People called them "Hurks" because they came from a place called Zeta Herculis.

The Hurk glanced at the baskets and gimcracks hung over the counter, and puffed its cigar. Then it said, in a blurred but comprehensible voice, "What is that?" It pointed downward with one horny, three-fingered hand.

"The little Indian papoose?" Martha Crawford said, in a voice that rose to a squeak. "Or the birchbark calendar?"

"No, that," said the Hurk, pointing down again. This time, craning over the counter, the Crawfords were able to see that

it was looking at a large, dis-shaped gray something that lay on the ground.

"That?" Llewellyn asked doubtfully.

"That."

Llewellyn Crawford blushed. "Why—that's just a cowpat. One of them cows from the dairy got loose from the herd yesterday, and she must have dropped that there without me noticing."

"How much?"

The Crawfords stared at him, or it, without comprehension. "How much what?" Llewellyn asked finally.

"How much," the alien growled around its cigar, "for the cowpat?"

The Crawfords exchanged glances. "I never heard—" said Martha in an undertone, but her husband shushed her. He cleared his throat. "How about ten c—well, I don't want to cheat you—how about a quarter?"

The alien produced a large change purse, laid a quarter on the counter and grunted something to its companion in the car.

The other alien got out, bringing a square porcelain box and a gold-handled shovel. With the shovel, she—or it—carefully picked up the cowpat and deposited it in the box.

Both aliens then got into the car and drove away, in a whine of turbines and a cloud of dust.

The Crawfords watched them go, then looked at the shiny quarter lying on the counter. Llewellyn picked it up and bounced it in his palm. "Well, say!" He began to smile.

All that week the roads were full of aliens in their long shiny cars. They went everywhere, saw everything, paid their way with bright new-minted coins and crisp paper bills.

There was some talk against the government for letting them in, but they were good for business and made no trouble. Some claimed to be tourists, others said they were sociology students on a field trip.

Llewellyn Crawford went into the adjoining pasture and picked out four cowpats to deposit near his basket stand. When the next Hurk came by, Llewellyn asked, and got, a dollar apiece.

"But why do they want them?" Martha wailed.

"What difference does that make?" her husband asked. "They want 'em—we got 'em! If Ed Lacey calls again about that mortgage payment, tell him not to worry!" He cleared off the counter and arranged the new merchandise on it. He jacked his price up to two dollars, then to five.

Next day he ordered a new sign: COWPATS.

One fall afternoon two years later, Llewellyn Crawford threw his hat in a corner, and sat down hard. He glared over his glasses at the large circular object, tastefully tinted in concentric rings of blue, orange and yellow, which was mounted over the mantelpiece. To the casual eye, this might have been a genuine "Trophy" class pat, a museum piece, painted on the Hurk planet; but in fact, like so many artistic ladies nowadays, Mrs. Crawford had painted and mounted it herself.

"What's the matter, Lew?" she asked apprehensively. She had a new hairdo and was wearing a New York dress, but looked peaked and anxious.

"Matter!" Llewellyn grunted. "Old man Thomas is a damn fool, that's all. Four hundred dollars a head! Can't buy a cow at a decent price any more."

"Well, Lew, we do have seven herds already, don't we, and—"

"Got to have more to meet the demand, Martha!" said Llewellyn, sitting up. "My heaven, I'd think you could see that. With queen pats bringing up to fifteen dollars, and not enough to go 'round— And fifteen hundred for an emperor pat, if you're lucky enough—"

"Funny we never thought there was so many kinds of pats," Martha said dreamily. "The emperor

— that's the one with the double whorl?"

Llewellyn grunted, picking up a magazine.

"Seems like a person could kind of—"

A kindly gleam came into Llewellyn's eyes. "Change one around?" he said. "Nope—been tried. I was reading about it in here just yesterday." He held up the current issue of *The American Pat Dealer*, then began to turn the glossy pages. "*Pat-O-Grams*," he read aloud. "*Preserving Your Pats. Dairying—a Profitable Sideline*. Nope. Oh, here it is. *Fake Pats a Flop*. See, it says here some fellow down in Amarillo got hold of an emperor and made a plaster mold. Then he used the mold on a couple of big cull pats—says here they was so perfect you couldn't tell the difference. But the Hurks wouldn't buy. They knew."

He threw the magazine down, then turned to stare out the back window toward the sheds. "There's that fool boy just sitting in the yard again. Why ain't he working?" Llewellyn rose, cranked down the louver, shouted through the opening, "You, Delbert! Delbert!" He waited. "Deaf, too," he muttered.

"I'll go tell him you want—" Martha began, struggling out of her apron.

"No, never mind—go myself.

Have to keep after 'em every damn minute." Llewellyn marched out the kitchen door and across the yard to where a gangling youth sat on a trolley, slowly eating an apple.

"Delbert!" said Llewellyn, exasperated.

"Oh—hello, Mr. Crawford," said the youth, with a gap-toothed grin. He took a last bite from the apple, then dropped the core. Llewellyn's gaze followed it. Owing to his missing front teeth, Delbert's apple cores were like nothing in this world.

"Why ain't you trucking pats to the stand?" Llewellyn demanded. "I don't pay you to set on no empty trolley, Delbert."

"Took some out this morning," the boy said. "Frank, he told me to take 'em back."

"He what?"

Delbert nodded. "Said he hadn't sold but two. You ask him if I'm lying."

"Do that," Llewellyn grunted. He turned on his heel and strode back across the yard.

Out at the roadside, a long car was parked beside a battered pickup at the pat stand. It pulled out as Llewellyn started toward it, and another one drove up. As he approached the stand, the alien was just getting back in. The car drove off.

Only one customer was left at the stand, a whiskered farmer in a checked shirt. Frank, the attendant, was leaning comfortably on the counter. The display shelves behind him were well filled with pats.

"Morning, Roger," Llewellyn said with well-feigned pleasure. "How's the family? Sell you a nice pat this morning?"

"Well, I don't know," said the whiskered man, rubbing his chin. "My wife's had her eye on that one there—" he pointed to a large, symmetrical pat on the middle shelf—"but at them prices—"

"You can't do better, believe me, Roger. It's an investment," said Llewellyn earnestly. "Frank, what did that last Hurk buy?"

"Nothing," said Frank. A persistent buzz of music came from the radio in his breast pocket. "Just took a picture of the stand and drove off."

"Well, what did the one before—"

With a whirr of turbines, a long shiny car pulled up behind him. Llewellyn turned. The three aliens in the car were wearing red felt hats with comic buttons sewed all over them, and carried Yale pennants. Confetti was strewn on their gray tweed suits.

One of the Hurks got out and THE BIG PAT BOOM

approached the stand, puffing a cigar through the hole in his—or its—orange scarf.

"Yes, sir?" said Llewellyn at once, hands clasped, bending forward slightly. "A nice pat this morning?"

The alien looked at the gray objects behind the counter. He, or it, blinked its yellow eyes and made a curious gurgling noise. After a moment Llewellyn decided that it was laughing.

"What's funny?" he demurred, his smile fading.

"Not funny," said the alien. "I laugh because I am happy. I go home tomorrow—our field trip is over. Okay to take a picture?" He raised a small lensed machine in one purple claw.

"Well, I suppose—" Llewellyn said uncertainly. "Well, you say you're going home? You mean all of you? When will you be coming back?"

"We are not coming back," the alien said. He, or it, pressed the camera, extracted the photograph and looked at it, then grunted and put it away. "We are grateful for an entertaining experience. Good-by." He turned and got into the car. The car drove off in a cloud of dust.

"Like that the whole morning," Frank said. "They don't buy nothing—just take pictures."

Llewellyn felt himself begin-

ning to shake. "Think he means it—they're all going away?"

"Radio said so," Frank replied. "And Ed Coon was through here this morning from Hortonville. Said he ain't sold a pat since day 'fore yesterday."

"Well, I don't understand it." Llewellyn said. "They can't just all quit." His hands were trembling badly, and he put them in his pockets. "Say, Roger," he said to the whiskered man, "now just how much would you want to pay for that pat?"

"Well—"

"It's a ten dollar pat, you know," Llewellyn said, moving closer. His voice had turned solemn. "Prime pat, Roger."

"I know that, but—"

"What would you say to seven fifty?"

"Well, I don't know. Might give—say, five."

"Sold," said Llewellyn. "Wrap that one up, Frank."

He watched the whiskered man carry his trophy off to the pickup. "Mark 'em all down, Frank," he said faintly. "Get whatever you can."

The long day's debacle was almost over. Arms around each other, Llewellyn and Martha Crawford watched the last of the crowd leaving the pat stand. Frank was cleaning up. Delbert, leaning against the side

of the stand, was eating an apple.

"It's the end of the world, Martha," Llewellyn said huskily. Tears stood in his eyes. "Prime pats, going two for a nickel!"

Headlights blinding in the dusk, a long, low car came nosing up to the pat stand. In it were two green creatures in raincoats, with feathery antennae that stood up through holes in their blue pork-pie hats. One of them got out and approached the pat stand with a curious scuttling motion. Delbert gaped, dropping his apple core.

"Serps!" Frank hissed, leaning over the stand toward Llewellyn. "Heard about 'em on the radio. From Gamma Serpentis, radio said."

The green creature was inspecting the half-bare shelves. Horny lids flickered across its little bright eyes.

"Pat, sir—ma'am?" Llewellyn asked nervously. "Not many left right now, but—"

"What is *that*?" the Serp asked in a rustling voice, pointing downward with one claw.

The Llewellyns looked. The Serp was pointing to a misshapen, knobby something that lay beside Delbert's boot.

"That there?" Delbert asked, coming partially to life "That's an apple core." He glanced across to Llewellyn, and a gleam

of intelligence seemed to come into his eyes. "Mr. Crawford, I quit," he said clearly. Then he turned to the alien. "That's a *Delbert Smith* apple core," he said.

Frozen, Llewellyn watched the Serp pull out a billfold and scuttle forward. Money changed hands. Delbert produced another apple and began enthusiastically reducing it to a core.

"Say, Delbert," said Llewellyn, stepping away from Martha. His voice squeaked, and he cleared his throat. "Looks like we got a good little thing going here. Now, if you was smart, you'd rent this pat stand—"

"Nope, Mr. Crawford," said

Delbert indistinctly, with his mouth full of apple. "Figure I'll go over to my uncle's place. He's got an orchard."

The Serp was hovering nearby, watching the apple core and uttering little squeals of appreciation.

"Got to be close to your source of supply, you know," said Delbert, wagging his head wisely.

Speechless, Llewellyn felt a tug at his sleeve. He looked down: it was Ed Lacey, the banker.

"Say, Lew, I tried to get you all afternoon, but your phone didn't answer. About your collateral on those loans..."

—DAMON KNIGHT

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THE BIG PAT BOOM

GALAXY

for
your
information

THE NAMES OF THE CONSTELLATIONS

In my column "Names in the Sky" which was published in the June, 1962, issue of *Galaxy* lack of space compelled me to neglect the names of the constellations. Ever since I have been receiving letters and postcards asking me to devote some

BY WILLY LEY

space to these names. By now I feel it is time to give in.

As I mentioned in my earlier column, the Astronomical Congress of 1928 decided to recognize eighty-eight different constellations for the purpose of having easy labels for referring to areas in the sky. The list designating the precise borders for each of these constellations was published by E. Delporte of Brussels in his *Atlas Celeste* (Cambridge, 1930) so that there can be no longer any disagreement whether a faint star at the edge of one constellation belongs to the particular constellation or to its neighbor. As regards the names which are now recognized they are all of long standing and many of them are classical, going back to Ptolemy's *Almagest*.

Ptolemy listed a total of forty-eight constellations, twelve of them being the Zodiac—the belt of constellations along which the sun moves in the course of a year. Of the others, twenty-one were to the north of the Zodiac and fifteen to the south of the Zodiac. In fact, it was Ptolemy who is responsible for twelve constellations in the Zodiac.

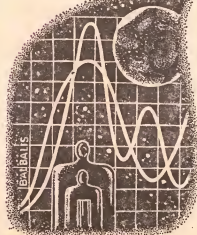
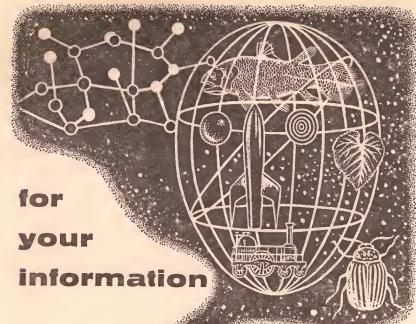
Most of the names of the signs of the Zodiac do not need any explanation. They are, in their customary order and in the La-

tin version, the following:

Aries (the Ram), *Taurus* (the Bull) and *Gemini* (the Twins, named "Castor and Pollux" in the Greek version and "Man and Wife" in sixteenth-century Europe), followed by *Cancer* (the Crab, or the Crayfish in western Europe), *Leo* (the Lion) and *Virgo*, (the Virgin, originally just "the Woman"). The next constellation, *Libra* (the Scales) is the one Ptolemy made a separate constellation. Before him the Greeks had considered the constellation *Libra* to be a part, namely the pincers, of the following constellation *Scorpio* while the Romans considered it the scales held by *Themis*, which was the same as the preceding constellation *Virgo*. Though Ptolemy gave it the rank of a separate constellation he still called it *chelai*, "the pincers". The constellations following *Libra*, are, of course, *Scorpius* (the Scorpion), *Sagittarius* (the Archer), *Capricornus* (the Goat, originally the Fish-Goat) *Aquarius* (the Water Carrier) and *Pisces* (the Fishes).

Ptolemy's twenty-one constellations to the north of the Zodiac, numbered consecutively, were:

- No. 1. *Ursa minor* and
- No. 2. *Ursa major* (literally the Little Bear and the Great Bear...in the past called the Small



- Wain and the Great Wain... now called the Little and Big Dipper.)
- No. 3. *Draco* (the Dragon)
- No. 4. *Cepheus* (this is a personal name, presumed to be the Latin version of the name of an Ethiopian king.)
- No. 5. *Bootes* (the Driver of the Oxen, or the Custodian of the Bears.)
- No. 6. *Corona borealis* (the Northern Crown)
- No. 7. *Hercules* (in Ptolemy's *Almagest*, "the Kneeling Man".)
- No. 8. *Lyra* (originally a turtle, the shell of which then became the lyre, a rather poetic development.)
- No. 9. *Cygnus* (the Swan; in Ptolemy "the Bird".)
- No. 10. *Cassiopeia* (wife of Cepheus; on some old charts this constellation is called the Throne or the Queen's Throne.)
- No. 11. *Perseus* (the rescuer of Andromeda.)
- No. 12. *Auriga* (the Drayman)
- No. 13. *Ophiuchus* (the Carrier of the Serpent)
- No. 14. *Serpens* (the serpent carried by Ophiuchus)
- No. 15. *Sagitta* (the Arrow)
- No. 16. *Aquila* (the Eagle)
- No. 17. *Delphinus* (the Dolphin)
- No. 18. *Equuleus* (the Filly; in Ptolemy the "Front Part of the Horse".)
- No. 19. *Pegasus* (the Horse; not a winged horse in Ptolemy.)
- No. 20. *Andromeda* (the daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopeia.)
- No. 21. *Triangulum* (the Triangle; originally the Nile Delta.)

The constellations to the south of the Zodiac were:

- No. 34. *Cetus* (the Whale)
- No. 35. *Orion* (the Hunter)
- No. 36. *Eridanus* (the River; in Ptolemy this constellation is called *potamos* which is the Greek word for River, meaning the Nile. The Romans changed this to Eridanus, the Amber River, which was their name for the Elbe river in Germany; later they called the same river Albis — which caused a lot of confusion.)
- No. 37. *Lepus* (the Hare)
- No. 38. *Canis major* (the Big Dog; in Ptolemy just *kynos*, the dog.)
- No. 39. *Canis minor* (the Little Dog; in Ptolemy this constellation was

called *prokyon*, which is now the name of its principal star.)

- No. 40. *Argo navis* (the Ship; since it also served as the symbol of the year it was pictured with either 12 or 52 oars, symbolizing months or weeks.)
- No. 41. *Hydra* (the Sea Serpent)
- No. 42. *Crater* (the Cup)
- No. 43. *Corvus* (the Raven)
- No. 44. *Centaurus* (the Centaur)
- No. 45. *Lupus* (the Wolf. In Ptolemy this constellation is just *therion*, which means "wild beast"; the Arabs were the ones who substituted a specific wild beast.)
- No. 46. *Ara* (the Altar)
- No. 47. *Corona australis* (the Southern Crown; the Arabs called it the Ostrich Nest.)
- No. 48. *Piscis austrinus* (the Southern Fish).

The constellation now known as *Coma Berenices* (the Hair of Berenice) was suggested before Ptolemy by the Greek astronomer Hipparchos, but for unknown reasons was not accepted by Ptolemy.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries three more constellations were added: *Monoceros* (the Unicorn), *Ca-*

melopardalis (the Giraffe) and *Columba* (the Dove). The latter is credited in countless books to Dr. Edmond Halley but it was actually suggested by the Dutch geographer Pieter Plancius. The gradual mapping of the southern sky which followed in the wake of geographical exploration added literally dozens of new constellations, most of which were dropped later. It may be mentioned at this point that the early explorers expected the southern sky to be a replica (or else a mirror image) of the northern sky and they were puzzled that this did not turn out to be the case. They were especially disappointed that there was no South Pole Star.

Of the many new constellations suggested during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a number are still accepted. They are: *Chamaeleon*, *Phoenix*, *Grus* (the Crane), *Pavo* (the Peacock), *Lacerta* (the Lizard), *Leo minor* (the Little Lion), *Hydrus* (the Water Snake), *Canes venatici* (the Hunting Dogs), *Dorado* (the Swordfish, or Goldfish), and *Crux* (the Southern Cross).

Two of the newer constellations, *Lynx* and *Apus*, require some explanation. The name *Lynx* applies to an area lacking in bright stars; it was created by the part-time astronomer, otherwise brewmaster and city al-

erman, Johannes Hewelcke (better known as Hevelius) of Danzig. A constellation was needed in that area to fill the space. Hevelius named it Lynx because he said that lynx eyes were needed to see anything at all.

As for *Apus* the name is translated with annoying regularity as The Bee in manuals for amateurs. But the Latin word for "bee" is *apis*. Actually the name comes from *Apus* (*seu avis*) in-taken notion that the bird of India" and is based on the mistaken notion that the Bird of Paradise was footless, which is what *apus* really means. Hence the constellation *Apus* should be rendered in English as "Bird of Paradise".

For the modern list of eighty-eight constellations, one of Ptolemy's constellations, No. 40, *Argo* was divided into three: *Carina*, *Vela* and *Puppis* (Keel, Sails and Poop) but the Greek letters for the stars form one sequence through all three.

The other constellations of the modern star atlas which have not been mentioned so far are, in alphabetical order:

Antlia (originally *Antlia pneumatica*, the Air Pump)

Caelum (originally *Caelum sculptoris*, the Sculptor's Tool)

Circinus (the Compasses, originally *Circinus et norma*,

Compasses and Ruler)

Fornax (the Furnace)

Horologium (the Pendulum Clock)

Indus (the Indian)

Mensa (the Table, originally *Mons mensae*, the Table Mountain, meaning Table Mountain near Cape Town in South Africa, from which Nicolas Louis de Lacaille, who introduced this constellation, observed the southern sky.)

Microscopium (the Microscope)

Musca (the Fly)

Norma (the Ruler, but in the sense of "straightedge".)

Pictor (originally *Equus pictoris*, the Painter's Easel)

Pyxis (the Mariner's Compass. The literal meaning of the word is "small (wooden) box"; it came to mean Mariner's Compass via the Italian form, *bussola della calamita*, which was a wooden bowl, filled with water, in which a reed (*calamita*), supporting the magnetic needle was floating.)

Reticulum (the Net; actually Lacaille's *reticule romboide*, the instrument he used for measuring angular distances between the stars.)

Sculptor (no translation needed)

Scutum (the Shield, or Buckler; originally *Scutum Sobiesii*,

Sobieski's Shield.)

Sextans (the Sextant)

Telescopium (the Telescope)

Triangulum australis (the Southern Triangle)

Tucana (the Toucan)

Volans (originally *Piscis volans*, the Flying Fish)

Vulpecula (usually called "the Fox" in English, though the word means Little Fox. The original name by Hevelius was *Vulpecula cum anser*, the Little Fox and the Goose.)

Any Questions?

You have repeatedly pointed out scientific facts behind myths or allusions in classical literature. How about these lines from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

Sweet are the uses of adversity;

Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,

Wears yet a precious jewel in its head.

What does the reference to the precious jewel mean? And while I am at it, are toads venomous?

Deborah Crawford
New York City.

Let me take your last question first, it's easier that way. Toads are amphibians, and no amphibian is venomous in the sense that they have poison fangs like some snakes. But all amphibians have skin glands; and the liquid exuded by the skin glands of one South American tree frog actually is toxic enough to be used

as an arrow poison. Whether the excretions of the skin glands of the common garden toad can be called venomous is the subject of a debate which by now has lasted for at least five centuries. In England you still find the belief in some quarters that touching a toad will cause warts, while German peasants are convinced that touching a toad in the light of a full moon will cure warts. (People just can't get together on some things!) I think it would be correct to say that the excretion is not venomous, though there are a few cases known where the handling of live toads caused a skin irritation.

Now for the "precious jewel", also known as the toadstone. It was supposed to be a yellowish stone which either had the shape of a toad or else had the image of a toad on it. And, while the toad itself does not produce such

a stone, contemporary artisans had no trouble furnishing them for people with money.

Shakespeare's contemporary, the writer Edward Topsell, who published a *Historie of Four-footed Beasts* in 1607, has provided us with a summary of the beliefs then current: "There be many late Writers, which doe affirme that there is a precious stone in the head of a Toade. . . . There be many that weare these stones in Ringes, beeing verily perswaded that they keep them from all manner of grypings and paines of the belly, and the small guttes. But the Art (as they term it) is in taking of it out, for they say it must be taken out of the head alive, before the Toade be dead, with a peece of cloth of the colour of redde Skarlet, wherewithall they are much delighted, so that while they stretch out themselves as it were in sport upon that cloth, they cast out the stone of their head, but instantly they sup it up againe, unless it be taken from them through some secrette hole in the said cloth, whereby it falleth into a cesterne or vessel of water, into which the Toade dare not enter, by reason of the coldness of the water."

Topsell was not Shakespeare's source, because *As You Like It* is usually dated as having been written in 1599 or 1600. Shake-

speare must have read about it in one of the unnamed writers quoted by Topsell who also said that the toad stone was good against the "falling sickness" and that it changed color in the presence of poison. Topsell's own own conclusion is:

"Now for my part I dare not conclude either with it, or against it, for many are directlie for this stone ingendered in the braine or head of the Toade; on the other side, some confesse such a stone by name and nature, but they make doubt of the generation of it, as others have delivered; and therefore, they beeing in sundry opinions, the found the Reader, I will referre him for his satisfaction unto a Toade, which he may easily every day kill: For although when the Toade is dead, the vertue thereof be lost, which consisted in the eye, or blew spot in the middle, yet the substance remaineth, and, if the stone be found there in substance, then is the question at an end; but, if it be not, then must the generation of it be sought for in some other place."

As a resident of Hollywood, California, I am well acquainted with the tar pools of Hancock Park and I have paid a number of visits to our Museum where the skeletons of animals found in

the tar pits have been re-assembled. My question is: how old are these bones? I have heard statements ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 years. Hasn't the radio-carbon dating method been tried out on these bones?

Magnus Hellmann
Hollywood, Calif.

The reason why you have heard such different age estimates is that during the last few decades there has been a general re-dating of recent geological events. It had always been assumed that the animals of the tar pools, the so-called La Brea Fauna, existed at about the time of the last glaciation in the North. And it had also been assumed that the last retreat of the glaciers of the Ice Age took place about 30,000 years ago, a few geologists thinking that it might have been as recently as 20,000 years ago.

Under these assumptions the age of the La Brea Fauna had to be not less than 30,000 years, probably nearer 50,000 years. But then the radio-carbon method permitted the dating of a spot in Wisconsin where a forest had been felled by the advance of the glaciers. It then turned out that the last glaciation was still going on 11,000 to 12,000 years ago. Nobody believed this result at first; obviously something had

gone wrong. To check what it might be, samples of European material known to have been formed late during the last glaciation were sent to the United States for dating. The dates of this European material agreed with the Wisconsin dates within about a thousand years.

Since the last glaciation had been more recent than had been assumed, the La Brea Fauna also had to be more recent. And another very strong hint was obtained elsewhere.

One of the animals from the tar pits is a large ground sloth. Radio-carbon dating of the remains of identical ground sloths from Gypsum Cave in Nevada showed that they were between 10,000 and 11,000 years old. All this made it unlikely that the remains from the tar pits would be much older. The logical next step was to date something from the tar pits.

When Pit No. 3 was excavated during the period from July, 1913, to August, 1914, a tree trunk, eight feet tall, was found rooted in the hard clay beneath the asphalt.

Wood from this tree was sent to two different laboratories for dating. Since the wood was tar-soaked, part of the sample was washed in xylol to remove the tar and then dated. The other part was dated without removing

the tar. The two cleaned samples gave the ages of 15,390 plus or minus 230 years and 13,890 plus or minus 280 years; the two samples which were not cleaned of tar gave the ages of 14,500 plus or minus 210 years and 14,110 plus or minus 420 years.

While the first laboratory had tested pieces of the tree trunk, the second laboratory was supplied with a piece of one of the roots of the same tree. This laboratory extracted the tar from the whole sample and tested the cleaned root and the tar extracted from it separately. The tar proved to be "dead", which means that it was too old to be dated by this method, or older than 28,000 years. The root gave an age of 14,400 plus or minus 300 years.

These tests show that the more recent age estimates of the La Brea Fauna were confirmed by direct dating. Instead of saying "30,000 to 50,000 years old," one should say "Between 10,000 and 20,000 years."

If both the Soviet Union and our own country stopped putting satellites into orbit, how many of those now in orbit would still circle the earth a hundred years from now? (I discount the space probes that are in orbit around the sun.) Isaac Braunstein
Brooklyn, N. Y.

The answer is "about twenty", but there is an uncertainty involved due to the fact that the U. S. Air Force has launched a number of secret satellites with undisclosed orbits. Some of them may have a lifetime of more than a century. And since the released information about the Russian series of "Cosmos" satellites is quite meager, it would be useless to guess about their lifetimes.

Of the known satellites, the ones with a very long life expectancy are: Vanguard I (fired March 17, 1958), Tiros I (fired April 1, 1960), Transit IIA (fired June 22, 1960), Echo I (fired August 12, 1960), Courier II (fired October 4, 1960), Tiros II (fired Nov. 23, 1960), Explorer IX (fired February 11, 1961), Tiros III (fired July 12, 1961), Midas III (fired same day as Tiros II), Midas IV (fired Oct. 21, 1961), Transit IVB (fired Nov. 15, 1961), Tiros IV (fired November 15, 1961), OSO-1 (fired March 7, 1962), 1962-Kappa-1 (fired April 9, 1962), Tiros V (fired June 19, 1962), Telstar (fired July 10, 1962), Tiros VI (fired September 18, 1962), Alouette (fired September 27, 1962) and Tiros VII (fired June 19, 1963).

I am in the eighth grade and interested in the sciences. Last

Length of one degree of longitude at different latitudes.

Degree of latitude	Place under that Latitude	Kilometers	Miles
0	Quito, Ecuador (Equator)	111.32	69.17
5	Cayenne, Guiana	110.90	68.91
10	San Jose, Costa Rica	109.64	68.13
15	Manilla, Philippines (approx.)	107.55	66.83
20	Guantanamo, Cuba	104.65	65.02
	Mexico, City		
	Hilo, Hawaii		
25	Taihook, Formosa	100.95	62.73
30	New Orleans, La., Cairo, Egypt	96.49	59.96
35	Albuquerque, N. Mex.	91.29	56.73
40	Philadelphia, Pa., Boulder Colo.	85.40	53.06
45	Minneapolis - St. Paul, Minn.	79.85	49.69
50	Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada	71.70	44.55
55	Newcastle on Tyne, England	64.00	39.77
60	Oslo, Norway	55.90	34.67
65	Fairbanks, Alaska	47.18	29.31
70	Tromsø, Norway (approx.)	33.19	20.73
75	Devon Island, north of North America	28.90	17.96
80	Axel Heiberg Island	19.40	12.05
85	Arctic ice north of Greenland	9.73	6.05
90	the Poles	0.00	0.00

week our science teacher pointed out that the usual map, the Mercator map, is all wrong because on this map the degrees of longitude form parallel lines while, in reality, they should all come together at the poles.

He also said that for this reason a degree of longitude is of different lengths, depending on latitude. It is longest at the equator and has no length at all at the poles. Now I have two questions. If the Mercator map is so wrong, why is it still used? And is there a simple formula for calculating how long a degree is in various places?

Michael Stromberg
Indianapolis, Ind.

The Mercator map just emphasizes a problem which is common to all maps. The earth is very nearly a sphere; hence

any part of that sphere, say the continent of Africa, is a curved surface. If you flatten it out on paper for the purpose of making a map you have to introduce a distortion of some kind. Only a globe can be accurate. But if you deal with a sufficiently small area, like that of a county, the distortion of the Mercator map makes no difference. For maps showing whole continents or oceans the Mercator map has the advantage that you can tell at a glance which place is due North (or due South) of another. Its directions are true, even if the dimensions are not.

There is no simple formula for computing the length of a degree; in fact it is a fairly complicated calculation. But I can give you a table, showing the values for every five degrees (above).
—WILLY LEY

IF THERE WERE NO BENNY CEMOLI

by PHILIP K. DICK

*They brought the peace of the
stars to ruined Earth . . . but
Earth had never asked for it!*

Scampering across the unplowed field the three boys shouted as they saw the ship; it had landed, all right, just where they expected, and they were the first to reach it.

"Hey, that's the biggest I ever saw!" Panting, the first boy halted. "That's not from Mars; that's from farther. It's from all the way out, I know it is." He became silent and afraid as he saw the size of it. And then looking up into the sky he realized that an armada had arrived, exactly as everyone had expected. "We better go tell," he said to his companions.

Back on the ridge, John LeConte stood by his steam-powered chauffeur-driven limousine, impatiently waiting for the boiler to warm. Kids got there first, he said to himself with anger. Whereas I'm supposed to. And the children were ragged; they were merely farm boys.

"Is the phone working today?" LeConte asked his secretary.

Glancing at his clipboard, Mr. Fall said, "Yes, sir. Shall I put through a message to Oklahoma City?" He was the skinniest employee ever assigned to LeConte's office. The man evidently took nothing for himself, was

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IF THERE WERE NO BENNY CEMOLI

positively uninterested in food. And he was efficient.

LeConte murmured, "The immigration people ought to hear about this outrage."

He sighed. It had all gone wrong. The armada from Proxima Centauri had after ten years arrived and none of the early-warning devices had detected it in advance of its landing. Now Oklahoma City would have to deal with the outsiders here on home ground—a psychological disadvantage which LeConte felt keenly.

Look at the equipment they've got, he thought as he watched the commercial ships of the flotilla begin to lower their cargos. Why, hell, they make us look like provincials. He wished that his official car did not need twenty minutes to warm up; he wished—

Actually, he wished that CURB did not exist.

Centaurus Urban Renewal Bureau, a do-gooding body unfortunately vested with enormous inter-system authority. It had been informed of the Misadventure back in 2170 and had started into space like a phototropic organism, sensitive to the mere physical light created by the hydrogen-bomb explosions. But LeConte knew better than that. Actually the governing organiza-

tions in the Centaurian system knew many details of the tragedy because they had been in radio contact with other planets of the Sol system. Little of the native forms on earth had survived. He himself was from Mars; he had headed a relief mission seven years ago, had decided to stay because there were so many opportunities here on Earth, conditions being what they were...

This is all very difficult, he said to himself as he stood waiting for his steam-powered car to warm. We got here first, but CURB does outrank us; we must face that awkward fact. In my opinion, we've done a good job of rebuilding. Of course, it isn't like it was before...but ten years is not long. Give us another twenty and we'll have the trains running again. And our recent road-building bonds sold quite successfully, in fact were oversubscribed.

"Call for you, sir, from Oklahoma City," Mr. Fall said, holding out the receiver of the portable field-phone.

"Ultimate Representative in the Field John LeConte, here," LeConte said into it loudly. "Go ahead; I say go ahead."

"This is Party Headquarters," the dry official voice at the other end came faintly, mixed with static, in his ear. "We've received

reports from dozens of alert citizens in Western Oklahoma and Texas of an immense—"

"It's here," LeConte said. "I can see it. I'm just about ready to go out and confer with its ranking members, and I'll file a full report at the usual time. So it wasn't necessary for you to check up on me." He felt irritated.

"Is the armada heavily armed?"

"Now," LeConte said. "It appears to comprise bureaucrats and trade officials and commercial carriers. In other words, vultures."

The Party desk-man said, "Well, go and make certain they understand that their presence here is resented by the native population as well as the Relief of War-torn Areas Administrative Council. Tell them that the legislature will be called to pass a special bill expressing indignation at this intrusion into domestic matters by an inter-system body."

"I know, I know," LeConte said. "It's been all decided; I know."

His chauffeur called to him, "Sir, your car is ready now."

The Party desk-man concluded, "Make certain they understand that you can't negotiate with them; you have no power to admit them to Earth. Only

the Council can do that and of course it's adamantly against that."

LeConte hung up the phone and hurried to his car.

Despite the opposition of the local authorities, Peter Hood of CURB decided to locate his headquarters in the ruins of the old Terran capital, New York City. This would lend prestige to the CURBmen as they gradually widened the circle of the organization's influence. At last, of course, the circle would embrace the planet. But that would take decades.

As he walked through the ruins of what had once been a major train yard, Peter Hood thought to himself that when the task was done he himself would have long been retired. Not much remained of the pre-tragedy culture here. The local authorities—the political nonentities who had flocked in from Mars and Venus, as the neighboring planets were called—had done little. And yet he admired their efforts.

To the members of his staff walking directly behind him he said, "You know, they have done the hard part for us. We ought to be grateful. It is not easy to come into a totally destroyed area, as they've done."

His man Fletcher observed,

"They got back a good return."

Hood said, "Motive is not important. They have achieved results." He was thinking of the official who had met them in his steam car; it had been solemn and formal, carrying complicated trappings. When these locals had first arrived on the scene years ago they had not been greeted, except perhaps by radiation-seared, blackened survivors who had stumbled out of cellars and gaped sightlessly. He shivered.

Coming up to him, a CURBman of minor rank saluted and said, "I think we've managed to locate an undamaged structure in which your staff could be housed for the time being. It's underground." He looked embarrassed. "Not what we had hoped for. We'd have to displace the locals to get anything attractive."

"I don't object," Hood said. "A basement will do."

"The structure," the minor CURBman said, "was once a great homeostatic newspaper, the *New York Times*. It printed itself directly below us. At least, according to the maps. We haven't located the newspaper yet; it was customary for the homeopapes to be buried a mile or so down. As yet we don't know how much of this one survived."

"But it would be valuable," Hood agreed.

"Yes," the CURBman said. "Its outlets are scattered all over the planet; it must have had a thousand different editions which it put out daily. How many outlets function—" He broke off. "It's hard to believe that the local politicians made no efforts to repair any of the ten or eleven world-wide homopapes, but that seems to be the case."

"Odd," Hood said. Surely it would have eased their task. The post-tragedy job of reuniting people into a common culture depended on newspapers, ionization in the atmosphere making radio and TV reception difficult if not impossible. "This makes me instantly suspicious," he said, turning to his staff. "Are they perhaps not trying to rebuild after all? Is their work merely a pretense?"

It was his own wife Joan who spoke up. "They may simply have lacked the ability to place the homeopapes on an operational basis."

Give them the benefit of the doubt, Hood thought. You're right.

"So the last edition of the *Times*," Fletcher said, "was put on the lines the day the Misadventure occurred. And the entire network of newspaper com-

munication and news-creation has been idle since. I can't respect these politicians; it shows they're ignorant of the basics of a culture. By reviving the homeopapes we can do more to re-establish the pre-tragedy culture than they've done in ten thousand pitiful projects." His tone was scornful.

Hood said, "You may misunderstand, but let it go. Let's hope that the cephalon of the pape is undamaged. We couldn't possibly replace it." Ahead he saw the yawning entrance which the CURBmen crews had cleared. This was to be his first move, here on the ruined planet, restoring this immense self-contained entity to its former authority. Once it had resumed its activity he would be freed for other tasks; the homeopape would take some of the burden from him.

A workman, still clearing debris away, muttered, "Jeez, I never saw so many layers of junk. You'd think they deliberately bottled it up down here." In his hands, the suction furnace which he operated glowed and pounded as it absorbed material, converting it to energy, leaving an increasingly enlarged opening.

"I'd like a report as soon as possible as to its condition," Hood said to the team of engi-

neers who stood waiting to descend into the opening. "How long it will take to revive it, how much—" He broke off.

Two men in black uniforms had arrived. Police, from the Security ship. One, he saw, was Otto Dietrich, the ranking investigator accompanying the armada from Centaurus, and he felt tense automatically; it was a reflex for all of them—he saw the engineers and the workmen cease momentarily and then, more slowly, resume their work.

"Yes," he said to Dietrich. "Glad to see you. Let's go off to this side room and talk there." He knew beyond a doubt what the investigator wanted; he had been expecting him.

Dietrich said, "I won't take up too much of your time, Hood. I know you're quite busy. What is this, here?" He glanced about curiously, his scrubbed, round, alert face eager.

In a small side room, converted to a temporary office, Hood faced the two policemen. "I am opposed to prosecution," he said quietly. "It's been too long. Let them go."

Dietrich tugging thoughtfully at his ear, said, "But war crimes are war crimes, even foul decades later. anyhow, what argument can there be? We're required by law to prosecute.

Somebody started the war. They may well hold positions of responsibility now, but that hardly matters."

"How many police troops have you landed?" Hood asked.

"Two hundred."

"Then you're ready to go to work."

"We're ready to make inquiries. Sequester pertinent documents and initiate litigation in the local courts. We're prepared to enforce cooperation, if that's what you mean. Various experienced personnel have been distributed to key points." Dietrich eyed him. "All this is necessary; I don't see the problem. Did you intend to protect the guilty parties—make use of their so-called abilities on your staff?"

"No," Hood said evenly.

Dietrich said, "Nearly eighty million people died in the Misfortune. Can you forget that? Or is it that since they were merely local people, not known to us personally—"

"It's not that," Hood said. He knew it was hopeless; he could not communicate with the police mentality. "I've already stated my objections. I feel it serves no purpose at this late date to have trials and hangings. Don't request use of my staff in this; I'll refuse on the grounds that I can spare no one, not even a janitor. Do I make myself clear?"

"You idealists," Dietrich sighed. "This is strictly a noble task confronting us... to rebuild, correct? What you don't or won't see is that these people will start it all over again, one day, unless we take steps now. We owe it to future generations. To be harsh now is the most humane method, in the long run. Tell me, Hood. What is this site? What are you resurrecting here with such vigor?"

"The New York Times," Hood said.

"It has, I assume, a morgue? We can consult its backlog of information? That would prove valuable in building up our cases."

Hood said, "I can't deny you access to material we uncover."

Smiling, Dietrich said, "A day by day account of the political events leading up to the war would prove quite interesting. Who, for instance, held supreme power in the United States at the time of the Misfortune? No one we've talked to so far seems to remember." His smile increased.

Early the next morning the report from the corps of engineers reached Hood in his temporary office. The power supply of the newspaper had been totally destroyed. But the cephalon, the governing brain-structure which guided and ori-

ented the homeostatic system, appeared to be intact. If a ship were brought close by, perhaps its power supply could be integrated into the newspaper's lines. Thereupon much more would be known.

"In other words," Fletcher said to Hood, as they sat with Joan eating breakfast, "it may come on and it may not. Very pragmatic. You hook it up and if it works you've done your job. What if it doesn't? Do the engineers intend to give up at that point?"

Examining his cup, Hood said, "This tastes like authentic coffee." He pondered. "Tell them to bring a ship in and start the homeopape up. And if it begins to print, bring me the edition at once." He sipped his coffee.

An hour later a ship of the line had landed in the vicinity and its power source had been tapped for insertion into the homeopape. The conduits were placed, the circuits cautiously closed.

Seated in his office, Peter Hood heard far underground a low rumble, a halting, uncertain stirring. They had been successful. The newspaper was returning to life.

The edition, when it was laid on his desk by a bustling CURB-man, surprised him by its accuracy. Even in its dormant

state, the newspaper had somehow managed not to fall behind events. Its receptors had kept going.

CURB LANDS, TRIP DECADE LONG, PLANS CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Ten years after the Misfortune of a nuclear holocaust, the inter-system rehabilitation agency, CURB, has made its historic appearance on Earth's surface, landing from a veritable armada of craft—a sight which witnesses described as "overpowering both in scope and in significance." CURBman Peter Hood, named top co-ordinator by Centaurian authorities, immediately set up headquarters in the ruins of New York City and conferred with aides, declaring that he had come "not to punish the guilty but to re-establish the planet-wide culture by every means available, and to restore—"

It was uncanny, Hood thought as he read the lead article. The varied news-gathering services of the homeopape had reached into his own life, had digested and then inserted into the lead article even the discussion between himself and Otto Dietrich. The newspaper was—had been—doing its job. Nothing of news-interest escaped it, even a discreet conversation carried on with no outsiders as witnesses. He would have to be careful.

Sure enough, another item, ominous in tone, dealt with the

arrival of the black jacks, the police.

SECURITY AGENCY VOWS "WAR CRIMINALS" TARGET
Captain Otto Dietrich, supreme police investigator arriving with the CURB armada from Proxima Centauri, said today that those responsible for the Misfortune of a decade ago "would have to pay for their crimes" before the bar of Centaurian justice. Two hundred black-uniformed police, it was learned by the *Times*, have already begun exploratory activities designed to —

The newspaper was warning Earth about Dietrich, and Hood could not help feeling grim-relish. The *Times* had not been set up to serve merely the occupying hierarchy. It served everyone, including those Dietrich intended to try. Each step of the police activity would no doubt be reported in full detail. Dietrich, who liked to work in anonymity, would not enjoy this. But the authority to maintain the newspaper belonged to Hood.

And he did not intend to shut it off.

One item on the first page of the paper attracted his further notice; he read it, frowning and a little uneasy.

**CEMOLI BACKERS RIOT
IN UPSTATE NEW YORK**
Supporters of Benny Cemoli, gathered in the familiar tent cities as-

sociated with the colorful political figure, clashed with local citizens armed with hammers, shovels, and boards, both sides claiming victory in the two-hour melee which left twenty injured and a dozen hospitalized in hastily-erected first aid stations. Cemoli, garbed as always in his toga-style red robes, visited the injured, evidently in good spirits, joking and telling his supporters that "it won't be long now" an evident reference to the organization's boast that it would march on New York City in the near future to establish what Cemoli deems "social justice and true equality for the first time in world history." It should be recalled that prior to his imprisonment at San Quentin —

Flipping a switch on his intercom system, Hood said, "Fletcher, check into activities up in the north of the county. Find out about some sort of a political mob gathering there."

Fletcher's voice came back, "I have a copy of the *Times*, too, sir. I see the item about this Cemoli agitator. There's a ship on the way up there right now; should have a report within ten minutes." Fletcher paused. "Do you think — it'll be necessary to bring in any of Dietrich's people?"

"Let's hope not," Hood said shortly.

Half an hour later the CURB ship, through Fletcher, made its report. Puzzled, Hood asked

that it be repeated. But there was no mistake. The CURB field team had investigated thoroughly. They had found no sign whatsoever of any tent city or any group gathering. And citizens in the area whom they had interrogated had never heard of anyone named "Cemoli." And there was no sign of any scuffle having taken place, no first aid stations, no injured persons. Only the peaceful, semi-rural countryside.

Baffled, Hood read the item in the *Times* once more. There it was, in black and white, on the front page, along with the news about the landing of the CURB armada. What did it mean?

He did not like it at all.

Had it been a mistake to revive the great, old, damaged homestatic newspaper?

From a sound sleep that night Hood was awakened by a clanging from far beneath the ground, an urgent racket that grew louder and louder as he sat up in bed, blinking and confused. Machinery roared. He heard the heavy rumbling movement as automatic circuits fitted into place, responding to instructions emanating from within the closed system itself.

"Sir," Fletcher was saying from the darkness. A light came

on as Fletcher located the temporary overhead fixture. "I thought I should come in and wake you. Sorry, Mrs. Hood."

"I'm awake," Hood muttered, rising from the bed and putting on his robe and slippers. "What's it doing?"

Fletcher said, "It's printing an extra."

Sitting up, smoothing her tousled blond hair back, Joan said, "Good lord. What about?" Wide-eyed, she looked from her husband to Fletcher.

"We'll have to bring in the local authorities," Hood said. "Confer with them." He had an intuition as to the nature of the extra roaring through the presses at this moment. "Get that Le-Cone, that politico who met us on our arrival. Wake him up and fly him here immediately. We need him."

It took almost an hour to obtain the presence of the haughty, ceremonious local potentate and his staff member. The two of them in their elaborate uniforms at last put in an appearance at Hood's office, both of them indignant. They faced Hood silently, waiting to hear what he wanted.

In his bathrobe and slippers Hood sat at his desk, a copy of the *Times* extra before him; he was reading it once more as Le-Conte and his man entered.

NEW YORK POLICE REPORT
CEMOLI LEGIONS ON MOVE
TOWARD CITY,
BARRICADES ERECTED,
NATIONAL GUARD ALERTED

He turned the paper, showing the headlines to the two Earthmen. "Who is this man?" he said.

After a moment LeConte said, "I — don't know."

Hood said, "Come on, Mr. LeConte."

"Let me read the article," LeConte said nervously. He scanned it in haste; his hands trembled as he held the newspaper. "Interesting," he said at last. "But I can't tell you a thing. It's news to me. You must understand that our communications have been sparse, since the Misfortune, and it's entirely possible that a political movement could spring up without our —"

"Please," Hood said. "Don't make yourself absurd."

Flushing, LeConte stammered, "I'm doing the best I can, summoned out of my bed in the middle of the night."

There was a stir, and through the office doorway came the rapidly-moving figure of Otto Dietrich, looking grim. "Hood," he said without preamble, "there's a *Times* kiosk near my headquarters. It just posted this." He

held up a copy of the extra. "The damn thing is running this off and distributing it throughout the world, isn't it? However, we have crack teams up in that area and they report absolutely nothing, no road blocks, no militia-style troops on the move, no activity of any sort."

"I know," Hood said. He felt weary. And still, from beneath them, the deep rumble continued, the newspaper printing its extra, informing the world of the march by Benny Cemoli's supporters on New York City — a fantasy march, evidently, a product manufactured entirely within the cephalon of the newspaper itself.

"Shut it off," Dietrich said.

Hood shook his head. "No. I want to know more."

"That's no reason," Dietrich said. "Obviously, it's defective. Very seriously damaged, not working properly. You'll have to search elsewhere for your worldwide propaganda network." He tossed the newspaper down on Hood's desk.

To LeConte, Hood said, "Was Benny Cemoli active before the war?"

There was silence. Both LeConte and his assistant Mr. Fall were pale and tense; they faced him tight-lipped, glancing at each other.

"I am not much for police

matters," Hood said to Dietrich, "but I think you could reasonably step in here."

Dietrich, understanding, said, "I agree. You two men are under arrest. Unless you feel inclined to talk a little more freely about this agitator in the red toga." He nodded to two of his police, who stood by the office doorway; they stepped obediently forward.

As the two policemen came up to him, LeConte said, "Come to think of it, there was such a person. But — he was very obscure."

"Before the war?" Hood asked.

"Yes," LeConte nodded slowly. "He was a joke. As I recall, and it's difficult... a fat, ignorant clown from some backwoods area. He had a little radio station or something over which he broadcast. He peddled some sort of anti-radiation box which you installed in your house, and it made you safe from bomb-test fallout."

Now his staff member Mr. Fall said, "I remember. He even ran for the UN senate. But he was defeated, naturally."

"And that was the last of him?" Hood asked.

"Oh yes," LeConte said. "He died of Asian flu soon after. He's been dead for fifteen years."

In a helicopter, Hood flew slowly above the terrain depicted in the *Times* articles, seeing for himself that there was no sign of political activity. He did not feel really assured until he had seen with his own eyes that the newspaper had lost contact with actual events. The reality of the situation did not coincide with the *Times'* articles in any way; that was obvious. And yet — the homeostatic system continued on.

Joan, seated beside him, said, "I have the third article here, if you want to read it." She had been looking the latest edition over.

"No," Hood said.

"It says they're in the outskirts of the city," she said. "They broke through the police barricades and the governor has appealed for UN assistance."

Thoughtfully, Fletcher said, "Here's an idea. One of us, preferably you, Hood, should write a letter to the *Times*."

Hood glanced at him.

"I think I can tell you exactly how it should be worded," Fletcher said. "Make it a simple inquiry. You've followed the accounts in the paper about Cemoli's movement. Tell the editor —" Fletcher paused. "That you feel sympathetic and you'd like to join the movement. Ask the paper how."

To himself, Hood thought, In other words ask the newspaper to put me in touch with Cemoli. He had to admire Fletcher's idea. It was brilliant, in a crazy sort of way. It was as if Fletcher had been able to match the derangement of the newspaper by a deliberate shift from common sense on his own part. He would participate in the newspaper's delusion. Assuming there was a Cemoli and a march on New York, he was asking a reasonable question.

Joan said, "I don't want to sound stupid, but how does one go about mailing a letter to a homeopape?"

"I've looked into that," Fletcher said. "At each kiosk set up by the paper there's a letter-slot, next to the coin-slot where you pay for your paper. It was the law, when the homeopapes were set up originally, decades ago. All we need is your husband's signature." Reaching into his jacket, he brought out an envelope. "The letter's written."

Hood took the letter, examined it. So we desire to be part of the mythical fat clown's throng, he said to himself. "Won't there be a headline reading CURB CHIEF JOINS MARCH ON EARTH CAPITAL?" he asked Fletcher, feeling a trace of wry amusement. "Wouldn't a good, enterprising

homeopape make front page use of a letter such as this?"

Obviously Fletcher had not thought of that; he looked chagrined. "I suppose we had better get someone else to sign it," he admitted. "Some minor person attached to your staff." He added, "I could sign it myself."

Handing him the letter back, Hood said, "Do so. It'll be interesting to see what response, if any, there is." Letters to the editor, he thought. Letters to a vast, complex, electronic organism buried deep in the ground, responsible to no one, guided solely by its own ruling circuits. How would it react to this external ratification of its delusion? Would the newspaper be snapped back to reality?

It was, he thought, as if the newspaper, during these years of its enforced silence, had been dreaming, and now, reawakened, it had allowed portions of its former dreams to materialize in its pages along with its accurate, perceptive accounts of the actual situation. A blend of figments and sheer, stark reporting. Which ultimately would triumph? Soon, evidently, the unfolding story of Benny Cemoli would have the toga-wearing spellbinder in New York; it appeared that the march would succeed. And what then? How could this be squared with the

arrival of CURB, with all its enormous inter-system authority and power? Surely the homeopape, before long, would have to face the incongruity.

One of the two accounts would have to cease... but Hood had an uneasy intuition that a homeopape which had dreamed for a decade would not readily give up its fantasies.

Perhaps, he thought, the news of us, of CURB and its task of rebuilding Earth, will fade from the pages of the *Times*, will be given a steadily decreasing coverage each day, farther back in the paper. And at last only the exploits of Benny Cemoli will remain.

It was not a pleasant anticipation. It disturbed him deeply. As if, he thought, we are only real so long as the *Times* writes about us; as if we were dependent for our existence on it.

Twenty-four hours later, in its regular edition, the *Times* printed Fletcher's letter. In print it struck Hood as flimsy and contrived — surely the homeopape could not be taken in by it, and yet here it was. It had managed to pass each of the steps in the pape's processing.

Dear Editor:

Your coverage of the herole march on the decadent plutocrat-

ic stronghold of New York City has fired my enthusiasm. How does an ordinary citizen become a part of this history in the making? Please inform me at once, as I am eager to join Cemoli and endure the rigors and triumphs with the others.

Cordially,

Rudolf Fletcher

Beneath the letter, the homeopape had given an answer; Hood read it rapidly.

Cemoli's stalwarts maintain a recruiting office in downtown New York; address, 460 Bleekman St., New York 32. You might apply there, if the police haven't cracked down on these quasi-legal activities, in view of the current crisis.

Touching a button on his desk, Hood opened the direct line to police headquarters. When he had the chief investigator, he said, "Dietrich, I'd like a team of your men; we have a trip to make and there may be difficulties."

After a pause Dietrich said drily, "So it's not all noble reclamation after all. Well, we've already dispatched a man to keep an eye on the Bleekman Street address. I admire your letter scheme. It may have done the trick." He chuckled.

Shortly, Hood and four black-uniformed Centaurian policemen flew by 'copter above the ruins of New York City, search-

ing for the remains of what had once been Bleekman Street. By the use of a map they managed after half an hour to locate themselves.

"There," the police captain in charge of the team said, pointing. "That would be it, that building used as a grocery store." The 'copter began to lower.

It was a grocery store, all right. Hood saw no signs of political activity, no persons loitering, no flags or banners. And yet—something ominous seemed to lie behind the commonplace scene below, the bins of vegetables parked out on the sidewalk, the shabby women in long cloth coats who stood picking over the winter potatoes, the elderly proprietor with his white cloth apron sweeping with his broom. It was too natural, too easy. It was too ordinary.

"Shall we land?" the police captain asked him.

"Yes," Hood said. "And be ready."

The proprietor, seeing them land in the street before his grocery store, laid his broom carefully to one side and walked toward them. He was, Hood saw, a Greek. He had a heavy mustache and slightly wavy gray hair, and he gazed at them with innate caution, knowing at once that they did not intend him any good. Yet he had decided

to greet them with civility; he was not afraid of them.

"Gentlemen," the Greek grocery store owner said, bowing slightly. "What can I do for you?" His eyes roved speculatively over the black Centaurian police uniforms, but he showed no expression, no reaction.

Hood said, "We've come to arrest a political agitator. You have nothing to be alarmed about." He started toward the grocery store; the team of police followed, their side arms drawn.

"Political agitation here?" the Greek said. "Come on. It is impossible." He hurried after them, panting, alarmed now. "What have I done? Nothing at all; you can look around. Go ahead." He held open the door of the store, ushering them inside. "See right away for yourself."

"That's what we intend to do," Hood said. He moved with agility, wasting no time on the conspicuous portions of the store; he strode directly on through.

The back room lay ahead, the warehouse with its cartons of cans, cardboard boxes stacked up on every side. A young boy was busy making a stock inventory; he glanced up, startled, as they entered. Nothing here, Hood thought. The

owner's son at work, that's all. Lifting the lid of a carton Hood peered inside. Cans of peaches. And beside that a crate of lettuce. He tore off a leaf, feeling futile and—disappointed.

The police captain said to him in a low voice, "Nothing, sir." "I see that," Hood said, irritably.

A door to the right, led to a closet. Opening it, he saw brooms and a mop, a galvanized pail, boxes of detergents. And—

There were drops of paint on the floor.

The closet, some time recently had been repainted when he bent down and scratched with his nail he found the paint still tacky.

"Look at this," he said, beckoning the police captain over.

The Greek, nervously, said, "What's the matter, gentlemen? You find something dirty and report to the board of health, is that it? Customers have complained—tell me the truth, please. Yes, it is fresh paint. We keep everything spick and span. Isn't that in the public interest?"

Running his hands across the wall of the broom closet, the police captain said quietly, "Mr. Hood, there was a doorway here. Sealed up now, very recently." He looked expectantly toward Hood, awaiting instructions.

Hood said, "Let's go in."

Turning to his subordinates, the police captain gave a series of orders. From the ship, equipment was dragged, through the store, to the closet; a controlled whine arose as the police began the task of cutting into the wood and plaster.

Pale, the Greek said, "This is outrageous. I will sue."

"Right," Hood agreed. "Take us to court." Already a portion of the wall had given way. It fell inward with a crash, and bits of rubble spilled down on to the floor. A white cloud of dust rose, then settled.

It was not a large room which Hood saw in the glare of the police flashlights. Dusty, without windows, smelling stale and ancient... the room had not been inhabited for a long, long time, he realized as he warily entered. It was empty. Just an abandoned storeroom of some kind, its wooden walls scaling and dingy. Perhaps before the Misfortune the grocery store had possessed a larger inventory. More stocks had been available then, but now this room was not needed. Hood moved about, flashing his beam of light up to the ceiling and then down to the floor. Dead flies, entombed here... and, he saw, a few live ones which crept haltingly in the dust.

"Remember," the police cap-

tain said, "it was boarded up just now, within the last three days. Or at least the painting was just now done, to be absolutely accurate about it."

"These flies, Hood said. "They're not even dead yet." So it had not even been three days. Probably the boarding-up had been done yesterday.

What had this room been used for? He turned to the Greek, who had come after them, still tense and pale, his dark eyes flickering rapidly with concern. This is a smart man, Hood realized. We will get little out of him.

At the far end of the store-room the police flashlights picked out a cabinet, empty shelves of bare, rough wood. Hood walked toward it.

"Okay," the Greek said thickly, swallowing. "I admit it. We have kept bootleg gin stored here. We became scared. You Centaureans—" He looked around at them all with fear. "You're not like our local bosses; we know them, they understand us. You! You can't be reached. But we have to make a living." He spread his hands, appealing to them.

From behind the cabinet the edge of something protruded. Barely visible, it might never have been noticed. A paper which had fallen there, almost

out of sight; it had slipped down farther and farther. Now Hood took hold of it and carefully drew it out. Back up the way it had come.

The Greek shuddered.

It was, Hood saw, a picture. A heavy, middle-aged man with loose jowls stained black by the grained beginnings of a beard, frowning, his lips set in defiance. A big man, wearing some kind of uniform. Once this picture had hung on the wall and people had come here and looked at it, paid respect to it. He knew who it was. This was Benny Cemoli, at the height of his political career, the leader glaring bitterly at the followers who had gathered here. So this was the man.

No wonder the *Times* showed such alarm.

To the Greek grocery store owner, Hood said, holding up the picture, "Tell me. Is this familiar to you?"

"No, no," the Greek said. He wiped perspiration from his face with a large red handkerchief. "Certainly not." But obviously, it was.

Hood said, "You're a follower of Cemoli, aren't you?"

There was silence.

"Take him along," Hood said to the police captain. "And let's start back." He walked from the room, carrying the picture with him.

As he spread the picture out on his desk, Hood thought, It isn't merely a fantasy of the *Times*. We know the truth now. The man is real and twenty-four hours ago this portrait of him hung on a wall, in plain sight. It would still be there this moment, if CURB had not put in its appearance. We frightened them. The Earth people have a lot to hide from us, and they know it. They are taking steps, rapidly and effectively, and we will be lucky if we can—

Interrupting his thoughts, Joan said, "Then the Bleekman Street address really was a meeting place for them. The paper was correct."

"Yes," Hood said.

"Where is he now?"

I wish we knew, Hood thought. "Has Dietrich seen the picture yet?"

"Not yet," Hood said.

Joan said, "He was responsible for the war and Dietrich is going to find it out."

"No one man," Hood said, "could solely be responsible."

"But he figured largely," Joan said. "That's why they've gone to so much effort to eradicate all traces of his existence."

Hood nodded.

"Without the *Times*," she said, "would we ever have guessed that such a political figure as Benny Cemoli existed? We owe

a lot to the paper. They overlooked it or weren't able to get to it. Probably they were working in such haste; they couldn't think of everything, even in ten years. It must be hard to obliterate every surviving detail of a planet-wide political movement, especially when its leader managed to seize absolute power in the final phase."

"Impossible to obliterate," Hood said. A closed-off store-room in the back of a Greek grocery store... that was enough to tell us what we needed to know. Now Dietrich's men can do the rest. If Cemoli is alive they will eventually find him, and if he's dead—they'll be hard to convince, knowing Dietrich. They'll never stop looking now.

"One good thing about this," Joan said, "is that now a lot of innocent people will be off the hook. Dietrich won't go around prosecuting them. He'll be busy tracking down Cemoli."

True, Hood thought. And that was important. The Centaurian police would be thoroughly occupied for a long time to come, and that was just as well for everyone, including CURB and its ambitious program of reconstruction.

If there had never been a Benny Cemoli, he thought suddenly, it would almost have been

necessary to invent him. An odd thought... he wondered how it had happened to come to him. Again he examined the picture, trying to infer as much as possible about the man from this flat likeness. How had Cemoli sounded? Had he gained power through the spoken word, like so many demagogues before him. And his writing... Maybe some of it would turn up. Or even tap recordings of speeches he had made, the actual sound of the man. And perhaps video tapes as well. Eventually it would all come to light; it was only a question of time. And then we will be able to experience for ourselves how it was to live under the shadow of such a man, he realized.

The line from Dietrich's office buzzed. He picked up the phone.

"We have the Greek here," Dietrich said. "Under drug-guidance he's made a number of admissions; you may be interested."

"Yes," Hood said.

Dietrich said, "He tells us he's been a follower for seventeen years, a real old-timer in the Movement. They met twice a week in the back of his grocery store, in the early days when the Movement was small and relatively powerless. That

picture you have—I haven't seen it, of course, but Stavros, our Greek gentleman, told me about it—that portrait is actually obsolete in the sense that several more recent ones have been in vogue among the faithful for some time now. Stavros hung onto it for sentimental reasons. It reminded him of the old days. Later on when the Movement grew in strength, Cemoli stopped showing up at the grocery store, and the Greek lost out in any personal contact with him. He continued to be a loyal dues-paying member, but it became abstract for him."

"What about the war?" Hood asked.

"Shortly before the war Cemoli seized power in a coup here in North America, through a march on New York City, during a severe economic depression. Millions were unemployed and he drew a good deal of support from them. He tried to solve the economic problems through an aggressive foreign policy—attacked several Latin American republics which were in the sphere of influence of the Chinese. That seems to be it, but Stavros is a bit hazy about the big picture... we'll have to fill in more from other enthusiasts as we go along. From some of the younger ones. After all, this one is over seventy years old."

Hood said, "You're not going to prosecute him, I hope."

"Oh, no. He's simply a source of information. When he's told us all he has on his mind we'll let him go back to his onions and canned apple sauce. He's harmless."

"Did Cemoli survive the war?"

"Yes," Dietrich said. "But that was ten years ago. Stavros doesn't know if the man is still alive now. Personally I think he is, and we'll go on that assumption until it's proved false. We have to."

Hood thanked him and hung up.

As he turned from the phone he heard, beneath him, the low, dull rumbling. The homeopape had once more started into life.

"It's not a regular edition," Joan said, quickly consulting her wristwatch. "So it must be another extra. This is exciting, having it happen like this; I can't wait to read the front page."

What has Benny Cemoli done now? Hood wondered. According to the *Times*, in its misphased chronicling of the man's epic... what stage, actually taking place years ago, has now been reached? Something climatic, deserving of an extra. It will be interesting, no doubt of that. The *Times* knows what is fit to print.

He, too, could hardly wait.

In downtown Oklahoma City, John LeConte put a coin into the slot of the kiosk which the *Times* had long ago established there. The copy of the *Times*, latest extra slid out, and he picked it up and read the headline briefly, spending only a moment on it to verify the essentials. Then he crossed the sidewalk and stepped once more into the rear seat of his chauffeur-driven steam car.

Mr. Fall said circumspectly, "Sir, here is the primary material, if you wish to make a word-by-word comparison." The secretary held out the folder, and LeConte accepted it.

The car started up. Without being told, the chauffeur drove in the direction of Party headquarters. LeConte leaned back, lit a cigar and made himself comfortable.

On his lap, the newspaper blazed up its enormous headlines.

CEMOLI ENTERS COALITION UN GOVERNMENT; TEMPORARY CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES

To his secretary, LeConte said, "My phone, please."

"Yes sir." Mr. Fall handed him the portable field-phone.

"But we're almost there. And it's always possible, if you don't mind my pointing it out, that they may have tapped us somewhere along the line."

"They're busy in New York," LeConte said. "Among the ruins." In an area that hasn't mattered as long as I can remember, he said to himself. However, possibly Mr. Fall's advice was good; he decided to skip the phone call. "What do you think of this last item?" he asked his secretary, holding up the newspaper.

"Very success-deserving," Mr. Fall said, nodding.

Opening his briefcase, LeConte brought out a tattered, coverless textbook. It had been manufactured only an hour ago, and it was the next artifact to be planted for the invaders from Proxima Centaurus to discover. This was his own contribution, and he was personally quite proud of it. The book outlined in massive detail Cemoli's program of social change; the revolution depicted in language comprehensible to school children.

"May I ask," Mr. Fall said, "if the Party hierarchy intends for them to discover a corpse?"

"Eventually," LeConte said. "But that will be several months from now." Taking a pencil from his coat pocket he wrote

in the tattered textbook, crudely, as if a pupil had done it:

DOWN WITH CEMOLI

Or was that going too far? No, he decided. There would be resistance. Certainly of the spontaneous, school boy variety. He added:

WHERE ARE THE ORANGES?

Peering over his shoulder, Mr. Fall said, "What does that mean?"

"Cemoli promises oranges to the youth," LeConte explained. "Another empty boast which the revolution never fulfills. That was Stavros' idea... he being a grocer. A nice touch." Giving it, he thought, just that much more semblance of verisimilitude. It's the little touches that have done it.

"Yesterday," Mr. Fall said, "when I was at Party headquarters, I heard an audio tape that had been made. Cemoli addressing the UN. It was uncanny; if you didn't know—"

"Who did they get to do it?" LeConte asked, wondering why he hadn't been in on it.

"Some nightclub entertainer here in Oklahoma City. Rather obscure, of course. I believe he specializes in all sorts of characterizations. The fellow gave it

a bombastic, threatening quality... I must admit I enjoyed it."

And meanwhile, LeConte thought, *there are no war-crimes trials*. We who were leaders during the war, on Earth and on Mars, we who held responsible posts—we are safe, at least for a while. And perhaps it will be forever. If our strategy continues to work. And if our tunnel to the cephalon of the homeopape, which took us five years

to complete, isn't discovered. Or doesn't collapse.

The steam car parked in the reserved space before Party headquarters; the chauffeur came around to open the door, and LeConte got leisurely out, stepping forth into the light of day, with no feeling of anxiety. He tossed his cigar into the gutter and then sauntered across the sidewalk, into the familiar building. —PHILIP K. DICK

LULLABY: 1990

Sleep now, little one, fortunate child.

(Summer follow spring and winter follow fall.)

When you were born the kind gods smiled.

Sleep, perfect little one, superior to all.

Some have three eyes and some have one.

(Dawn follow dark and dark follow day.)

Some have many legs and others have none;

some live a little while and then waste away.

Some are hair covered, head to toe.

(War follow hate and the bomb follow after.)

Some are giants and some never grow.

Sleep, perfect little one, to your mother's laughter.

Some eat flesh and some eat grasses.

(Men still love and still get married.)

Tentacled lads and two headed lasses

lie in the alley-ways, yet unburied.

Sleep now, little one, fortunate child.

(Summer follow spring and winter follow fall.)

When you were born the kind gods smiled.

Sleep, little one, who will never wake at all.

Sheri S. Eberhart



GALAXY'S

5 Star Shelf

THE INFINITE MOSKOWITZ

The man named Sam the Mosk, this millennium's Stentor, who gossips like an auctioneer, whose impact (if not influence) on fandom (if not science fiction) is without comparison ("He stamped about the Convention," wrote a fan, "dropping his own name.") has produced a book which is an in-group landmark, and in many a sequence can be accused not only with indefatigability but with downright scholarship.

On the theory that it is pointless to apply unguents until we have a patient, leave us first lay about us. Sam Moskowitz begins the book with the world's knobbiest definition of science fiction ("...a branch of fantasy identifiable by the fact that it eases the 'willing suspension of disbelief' on the part of its readers by utilizing an atmosphere of scientific credibility for its imaginative speculations in physical science, space, time, social

science, and philosophy") and ends with a more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger implication that sf has lost direction and ceased to evolve: "Suave writing (has) diluted most of the 'sense of wonder' in science fiction. The 'documentary,' too close to the present to allow for any imagination, (has) rinsed out most of what remained." In between is prose with the delicacy of a Caterpillar D-8 — no insult, really, for we have much respect for Mr. Caterpillars' products.

The above quotes and citations are legitimate examples of a man's legitimate opinions. What makes one carp a little is the air of positiveness with which they are presented. One would be happier if, say, the words *In my opinion*... were run as a sort of subtitle on the dedication page — a good position for it, at that, for there's no question that the man is dedicated to just that. And it is unfair to pick at a work of scholarship as if scholarship should have conferred grace, just as it is unfair to pick at a graceful work for its lack of scholarship. If the criterion is: did the author achieve his aims? then on the one hand Shakespeare did, for all his lack of science, and so did Moskowitz, for all his lack of poetry. And here end the kicks.

The kudos is heartfelt and

multifarious. One could not want a more detailed and fascinating account of the birth and growth of what is certainly one of the most interesting forms of expression ever to strike this or any other planet. From the scientific dreams of Cyrano to the beauty of Dejah Thoris, from the influence of the legendary Golem on robot stories to the battle of the behemoths, wherein Otis Adelbert Kline took on Edgar Rice Burroughs, with epics as weapons: from the very well-written exposition of M. P. Shiel's truly vicious anti-Semitism to the extraordinary career of the almost-unknown Lu Senarens, author of most of the Frank Reade, Jr. series — there is hardly a page of this remarkable book which will not yield you an astonishment, a revelation or at the very least as well, whad-daye know!" Some of the astonishments involve names that you may never have associated with science fiction before — Fitz-James O'Brien, for one, and Edward Everett Hale. And some of the examinations — for example, that of Philip Wylie, and of Olaf Stapledon — have a style and depth quite transcending all criticism of ham-handedness.

In view of our remarks above concerning a man's right to his own choices and conclusions, what follows is not a complaint.

We must, however, record our disappointment in seeing no mention of certain writers who have been, personally, profoundly influential — so much so that it would be hard for us (again, personally) to imagine science fiction without them. They are Budrys, Shute, Tenn, Vonnegut, Vercors and Tom Godwin, each of whom has inspired and instructed your correspondent. But certainly every writer in the field could compose a similar list, and it would be no discredit to Mr. Moskowitz, for each of us has a different opinion (sometimes differing a little, sometimes drastically) of what science fiction is. In sum, no one has surveyed the roots of sf as well as Mr. M.; probably no one ever will; possibly, no one else can.

The book is published by World, costs \$6 (and is worth it) has 353 pages and includes a pretty good index. Ask for *Explorers of the Infinite*, Shapers of Science Fiction, by Sam Moskowitz.

— THEODORE STURGEON

OTHER NEW BOOKS

In *The World of Flying Saucers* (Doubleday), Donald H. Wenzel and Lyle G. Boyd have gone to great lengths to track down all the surviving evidence surrounding every recorded UFO

"sighting" of the period of the Great Saucer Craze. There is no doubt that at this time a number of people saw things they couldn't account for and, in all good faith, attempted to explain them in terms of extra-terrestrial visitors. There is even less doubt that in the wake of these early sightings there sprang up a rank growth of lunatics and publicity-hounds, buck-hustlers and frauds who by their clamor and obvious unreliability discredited not only their own claims but those of all the others. Dr. Menzel and Mrs. Boyd have patiently gone over every single case, preposterous or not, and they, present their findings here, without passion but with candor and touches of wit. What it all comes down to is that the case for flying saucers rests mostly on the words of observers describing what they saw — or thought they saw, or claimed to see — buttressed to some degree by a few smudged photographs and a scattering of physical objects described by their discoverers as of off-Earth origin. Many exhibits in each category are demonstrably fakes. The best that can be said of the remaining photographs and specimens is that they are ambiguous. As to the eyewitness reports, there are many by persons whose statements deserve careful attention; but in essentially every

such case the authors have been able to show the existence, either as a matter of record or as at least a reasonable probability, of some other conspicuous phenomenon — star, planet, cloud, plane, weather balloon or optical effect — which might easily have been mistaken for a UFO. True, the fact that an observer *might* have been mistaken is a long way from proof that he was mistaken. The authors point out, however, that if these other phenomena are not what the sighters saw, it is at least interesting that they didn't mention these things when they were in the very part of the sky where the sighters reported "unidentified" objects. The authors conclude, rather regretfully, that while there are grounds for believing that intelligent life may exist off-Earth and may at any moment come calling on us, "No evidence yet found indicates such visits have begun." And so we end an age . . .

In *Spectrum II* (Harcourt, Brace & World), Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest put together an anthology of familiar but first-rate stories by Wyman Guin, James Blish, Philip K. Dick, Isaac Asimov and others, and present them with a thoughtful introduction berating those critics who reflexively damn all science fiction. What they say

about these critics is well said, but they say it twice; the first time is as a two-line rubric on the dedication page of the volume:

*"Sf's no good," they bellow
till we're deaf.*

*"But this looks good." "Well,
then, it's not sf."*

When we published Jack Vance's *The Dragon Masters* here a year or so ago, it was received with considerable delight, not only for its own considerable merits but because of the fine Gaughan illustrations that adorned it. Now in book form (Ace), the publishers have kept Gaughan on to do its cover, which is again a handsome job. The story remains what it was: one of the best sf stories to appear anywhere in the past half-dozen years. This is a double volume: the other half is an earlier, but well worthwhile, Vance science-fiction adventure story called *The Five Gold Bands* . . . Readers of our companion magazine, *If*, will be pleased by another new Ace book, or at least by half of it: six of Keith Laumer's Retief stories, collected under the title of *Envoy to New Worlds*. The other half of the book is *Flight from Yesterday*, by Robert Moore Williams, which brings some Atlanteans to the 20th century for assorted adventures, with mixed effect.

— FP

AND ALL THE EARTH

*There's nothing wrong with
dying — it just hasn't ever
had the proper sales pitch!*

It all began when the new bookkeeping machine of a large Midwestern coffin manufacturer slipped a cog, or blew a transistor, or something. It was fantastic that the error — one of two decimal places — should enjoy a straight run of okays, human and mechanical, clear down the line; but when the figures clacked out at the last clacking-out station, there it was. The figures were now sacred; immutable; and it is doubtful whether the President of the concern or the Chairman of the Board would have dared question them — even if either of those two gentlemen had been in town.

As for the Advertising Manager, the last thing he wanted to do was question them. He carried them (they were the budget for the coming fiscal year) into his office, staggering a little on the way, and dropped dazedly into his chair. They

showed the budget for his own department as exactly one hundred times what he'd been expecting. That is to say, fifty times what he'd put in for.

When the initial shock began to wear off, his face assumed an expression of intense thought. In about five minutes he leaped from his chair, dashed out of the office with a shouted syllable or two for his secretary, and got his car out of the parking lot. At home, he tossed clothes into a travelling bag and barged toward the door, giving his wife a quick kiss and an equally quick explanation. He didn't bother to call the airport. He meant to be on the next plane east, and no nonsense about it...

With one thing and another, the economy hadn't been exactly in overdrive that year, and predictions for the Christmas season were gloomy. Early

A GRAVE

by C. C. MacAPP

ILLUSTRATED
BY GAUGHAN

retail figures bore them out. Gift buying dribbled along feebly until Thanksgiving, despite brave speeches by the Administration. The holiday passed more in self-pity than in thankfulness among owners of gift-oriented businesses.

Then, on Friday following Thanksgiving, the coffin ads struck.

Struck may be too mild a word. People on the streets saw feverishly-working crews (at holiday rates!) slapping up posters on billboards. The first poster was a dilly. A toothy and toothsome young woman leaned over a coffin she'd been unwrapping. She smiled as if she'd just received overtures of matrimony from an eighty-year-old billionaire. There was a Christmas tree in the background, and the coffin was appropriately wrapped. So was she. She looked as if had just gotten out of bed, or

were ready to get into it. For amorous young men, and some not so young, the message was plain. The motto, "*The Gift That Will Last More Than a Lifetime*", seemed hardly to the point.

Those at home were assailed on TV with a variety of bright and clever skits of the same import. Some of them hinted that, if the young lady's gratitude were really precipitous, and the bedroom too far away, the coffin might be comfy.

Of course the more settled elements of the population were not neglected. For the older married man, there was a blow directly between the eyes: "*Do You Want Your Widow to Be Half-Safe?*" And, for the spinster without immediate hopes, "*I Dreamt I Was Caught Dead Without My Virginform Cas- ket!*".

Newspapers, magazines and every other medium added to the assault, never letting it cool. It was the most horrendous campaign, for sheer concentration, that had ever battered at the public mind. The public reeled, blinked, shook its head to clear it, gawked, and rushed out to buy.

Christmas was not going to be a failure after all. Department store managers who had, grudgingly and under strong sales pressure, made space for a single coffin somewhere at the rear of the store, now rushed to the telephones like touts with a direct pronouncement from a horse. Everyone who possibly could got into the act. Grocery supermarkets put in casket departments. The Association of Pharmaceutical Retailers, who felt they had some claim to priority, tried to get court injunctions to keep caskets out of service stations, but were unsuccessful because the judges were all out buying caskets. Beauty parlors showed real ingenuity in merchandising. Roads and streets clogged with delivery trucks, rented trailers, and whatever else could haul a coffin. The Stock Market went completely mad. Strikes were declared and settled within hours. Congress was called into session early. The President got authority to ration lumber and other materials suddenly in starvation-short supply. State laws were passed against cremation, under heavy lobby pressure. A new racket, called boxjacking, blossomed overnight.

The Advertising Manager who had put the thing over had been fighting with all the formidable

weapons of his breed to make his plant managers build up a stockpile. They had, but it went like a toupee in a wind tunnel. Competitive coffin manufacturers were caught napping, but by Wednesday after Thanksgiving they, along with the original one, were on a twenty-four hour, seven-day basis. Still only a fraction of the demand could be met. Jet passenger planes were stripped of their seats, supplied with Yankee gold, and sent to plunder the world of its coffins.

It might be supposed that Christmas goods other than caskets would take a bad dumping. That was not so. Such was the upsurge of prosperity, and such was the shortage of coffins, that nearly everything—with a few exceptions—enjoyed the biggest season on record.

On Christmas Eve the frenzy slumped to a crawl, though on Christmas morning there were still optimists out prowling the empty stores. The nation sat down to breathe. Mostly it sat on coffins, because there wasn't space in the living rooms for any other furniture.

There was hardly an individual in the United States who didn't have, in case of sudden sharp pains in the chest, several boxes to choose from. As for the rest of the world, it had better not die just now or it would be



literally a case of dust to dust.

Of course everyone expected a doozy of a slump after Christmas. But our Advertising Manager, who by now was of course Sales Manager and First Vice President also, wasn't settling for any boom-and-bust. He'd been a frustrated victim of his choice of industries for so many years that now, with his teeth in something, he was going to give it the old bite. He gave people a short breathing spell to arrange their coffin payments and move the presents out of the front rooms. Then, late in January, his new campaign came down like a hundred-megatonner.

Within a week, everyone saw quite clearly that his Christmas models were now obsolete. The coffin became the new status symbol.

The auto industry was of course demolished. Even people who had enough money to buy a new car weren't going to trade in the old one and let the new one stand out in the rain. The garages were full of coffins. Petroleum went along with Autos. (Though there were those who whispered knowingly that the same people merely moved over into the new industry. It was noticeable that the center of it became Detroit.) A few trucks

and buses were still being built, but that was all.

Some of the new caskets were true works of art. Others — well, there was variety. Compact models appeared, in which the occupant's feet were to be doubled up alongside his ears. One manufacturer pushed a circular model, claiming that by all the laws of nature the foetal position was the only right one. At the other extreme were virtual houses, ornate and lavishly equipped. Possibly the largest of all was the "Togetherness" model, triangular, with graduated recesses for Father, Mother, eight children (plus two playmates), and, in the far corner beyond the baby, the cat.

The slump was over. Still, economists swore that the new boom couldn't last either. They reckoned without the Advertising Manager, whose eyes gleamed brighter all the time. People already had coffins, which they polished and kept on display, sometimes in the new "Coffin-ports" being added to houses. The Advertising Manager's reasoning was direct and to the point. He must get people to use the coffins; and now he had all the money to work with that he could use.

The new note was woven in so gradually that it is not easy to put a finger on any one ad and

say, "It began here." One of the first was surely the widely-printed one showing a tattooed, smiling young man with his chin thrust out manfully, lying in a coffin. He was rugged-looking and likable (not too rugged for the spindly-limbed to identify with) and he oozed, even though obviously dead, virility at every pore. He was probably the finest-looking corpse since Richard the Lion-Hearted.

Neither must one overlook the singing commercials. Possibly the catchiest of these, a really cute little thing, was achieved by jazzing up the Funeral March.

It started gradually, and it was all so un-violent that few saw it as suicide. Teen-agers began having "Popping-off parties". Some of their elders protested a little, but adults were taking it up too. The tired, the unappreciated, the ill and the heavy-laden lay down in growing numbers and expired. A black market in poisons operated for a little while, but soon pinched out. Such was the pressure of persuasion that few needed artificial aids. The boxes were very comfortable. People just closed their eyes and exited smiling.

The Beatniks, who had their own models of coffin — mouldy, scroungy, and without lids, since the Beatniks insisted on being seen — placed their boxes on the

Grant Avenue in San Francisco. They died with highly intellectual expressions, and eventually were washed by the gentle rain.

Of course there were voices shouting calamity. When aren't there? But in the long run, and not a very long one at that, they availed naught.

It isn't hard to imagine the reactions of the rest of the world. So let us imagine a few.

The Communist Block immediately gave its Stamp of Disapproval, denouncing the movement as a filthy Capitalist Imperialist Pig plot. Red China, which had been squabbling with Russia for some time about a matter of method, screamed for immediate war. Russia exposed this as patent stupidity, saying that if the Capitalists wanted to die, warring upon them would only help them. China surreptitiously tried out the thing as an answer to excess population, and found it good. It also appealed to the well-known melancholy facet of Russian nature. Besides, after pondering for several days, the Red Bloc decided it could not afford to fall behind in anything, so it started its own program, explaining with much logic how it differed.

An elderly British philosopher endorsed the movement, on the grounds that a temporary set-

back in Evolution was preferable to facing up to anything.

The Free Bloc, the Red Bloc, the Neutral Bloc and such scraps as had been too obtuse to find themselves a Bloc were drawn into the whirlpool in an amazingly short time, if in a variety of ways. In less than two years the world was rid of most of what had been bedeviling it.

Oddly enough, the country where the movement began was the last to succumb completely. Or perhaps it is not so odd. Coffin-maker to the world, the American casket industry had by now almost completely automated box-making and gravedigging, with some interesting assembly lines and packaging arrangements; there still remained the jobs of management and distribution. The President of General Mortuary, an ebullient fellow affectionately called Sarcophagus Sam, put it well. "As long as I have a single prospective customer, and a single Stockholder," he said, mangling a stogie and beetling his brows at the one reporter who'd showed up for the press conference, "I'll try to put him in a coffin so I can pay him a dividend."

Finally, though, a man who thought he must be the last living human, wandered contentedly about the city of Denver

looking for the coffin he liked best. He settled at last upon a rich mahogany number with platinum trimmings, an Automatic Self-Adjusting Cadaver-contour Innerspring Wearever-Plastic-Covered Mattress with a built in bar. He climbed in, drew himself a generous slug of fine Scotch, giggled as the mattress prodded him exploringly, closed his eyes and sighed in solid comfort. Soft music played as the lid closed itself.

From a building nearby a turkey-buzzard swooped down, cawing in raucous anger because it had let its attention wander for a moment. It was too late. It clawed screaming at the solid cover, hissed in frustration and finally gave up. It flapped into the air begin, still grumbling. It was tired of living on dead small rodents and coyotes. It thought it would take a swing over to Los Angeles, where the pickings were pretty good.

As it moved westward over parched hills, it espied two black dots a few miles to its left. It circled over for a closer look, then grunted and went on its way. It had seen *them* before. The old prospector and his burro had been in the mountains for so long the buzzard had concluded they didn't know *how* to die.

The prospector, whose name

was Adams, trudged behind his burro toward the buildings that shimmered in the heat, humming to himself now and then or addressing some remark to the beast. When he reached the outskirts of Denver he realized something was amiss. He stood and gazed at the quiet scene. Nothing moved except some skinny packrats and a few sparrows foraging for grain among the unburied coffins.

"Tarnation!" he said to the burro. "Martians?"

A half-buried piece of newspaper fluttered in the breeze. He walked forward slowly and picked it up. It told him enough so that he understood.

"They're gone, Evie," he said to the burro, "all gone." He put his arm affectionately around her neck. "I reckon it's up to me and you agin. We got to start all over." He stood back and gazed at her with mild reproach. "I shore hope they don't favor your side of the house so much this time." — C. C. MacAPP



FORECAST

Next issue, naturally, contains the conclusion of Jack Vance's *The Star King*, about which it is only necessary to say that all the thrill and color of the first half, herein, is amply sustained and brought to an exciting climax in the second.

There's a certain temptation to rest on that, because if you won't be around to see how *The Star King* comes out, what can we tell you to change your mind? But, of course, there's more. Lots more—and, we think, a great deal that you'll find just as rewarding as Vance. There is, for example, the lead novelette, *Grandmother Earth*, by that Old Reliable, J. T. McIntosh. There's a novelette by Philip K. Dick called *Oh! to be a Blobel* which has to deal with certain unanticipated problems of the aftermath of future interplanetary wars. (Talk about disabled veterans! In Dick's view, the quadraplegics and other victims of minor-league events like World War II have nothing to worry about . . .)

And, of course, there'll be Willy Ley's usual contribution, short stories, features and all . . .



IN THE CONTROL TOWER

I

Deworth had almost lost the habit of looking from windows. The train which took him to the city every morning passed through a country in the terminal stages of a long war of self-destruction. Whatever had been burned, botched, poi-

soned or exhausted in that struggle had been filled along the right-of-way, among drifts of soot and ground-mists of sulphurous smoke and chemical flatulence, to form a long tedious mural—a parody of cloud-borne Asiatic hills, precipitous and always so close to the tracks that their tops could not be seen.

*Shadows haunted the dying alleys.
Madness stalked the wide streets.
And what lay at the city's heart?*

GALAXY

This was almost merciful, considering what had been done to the sky. When the train did not sneak between hills of slag, cinders, rubbish, garbage, dross and the bloody brown carrion of broken machinery, it shot like a bolt in the groove of an arbolost between unbroken barriers of advertising or through

by WILL MOHLER

Illustrated by GIUNTA



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JOHN GIUNTA 6B

deep concrete troughs and roaring tunnels full of grimy light and grubby air.

There was one inconsistency in this scheme of things: Just as the train emerged from a deep valley of slag-hills and swung into a long curve, passengers on the left side had a panoramic view of the city—a frozen scene of battle between geometrical monsters, made remote and obscure by the dust of a thousand thousand merely human struggles, too small to be visible from the crusty windows of the train by the merely human eye. They had about one second in which to absorb this vision of corporate purpose. Then they were plunging into a final stretch of tunnel to the center of the city itself, where no surface was ever more than fifteen paces away and where there were no horizons at all.

Dewforth was excited by this view even though it reached him in a fragmentary and subliminal way. Day after day he told himself that he would have all his faculties at the ready before the train swung into the curve. But morning after morning he was still emerging from the stale fumes of the preceding night's beer, or he allowed himself to be hypnotized by the sound of the wheels or fascinated by the jiggling of another passenger's

earlobe at that critical moment. The train had always entered the clangorous colon of the city before this resolve could crystallize in his mind, and he was left with an impression which lay somewhere in the scale of reality between the after-image of a light bulb and the morning memory of a fever-dream. He could never have described the scene except in loose generalities about build-ings of contrasting height and unemphatic color.

The single memorable feature of the panorama, looming above the rest, was not even a building. It eluded all familiar categories. It was, like the other components of the picture, rectangular; but it was a displaced rectangle. A shining thread of morning sky could be seen beneath it. It was only logical to suppose that it stood on legs of some kind—a complicated process of girders. The upper part appeared to be made of corrugated metal, but, as with the matter of the legs, it was impossible to separate what was actually seen and what was merely inferred. The only other structures Dewforth had seen which resembled it at all were water towers and shipyard cranes, but these had been mere toys compared with the thing that hovered over the center of the city.

Its purpose could not be guessed, but what disturbed Dewforth more was the fact that he could not be sure that it existed. He was a precision draftsman, more or less resigned to deteriorating eyesight, and his usual abstracted state of mind during that segment of his day had also to be considered. He hoped that someone else would mention the structure. Once—only, once—a man sitting on the opposite seat had made a comment which could have applied to it. "It turned," he said, just as the tunnel swallowed the train.

Dewforth would have liked to ask the other passenger what he had meant. Had he seen the same thing? Had he seen anything at all? And what had he meant by "turned"?

But he had not asked. The other had been not merely forbidding, not merely repugnant, but alternately forbidding and repugnant—in daylight, an impeccable burgher sitting tall and righteous under a tall hat; in tunnels, a hunchbacked gargoyle picking its nose in the fickle darkness.

If Dewforth had been the only passenger on the train, or indeed the last man in the world, he could not have been more alone with his wonder. You did not ask whimsical questions of strangers nowadays. You did not ask

many questions of friends. All uncertainties incubated in private darkness; they lived and grew and even put forth new appendages.

Not a building. Not a water tank. Not a crane. Perhaps it was only an illusion.

Illusion or not, it wanted a name so that it might be at least catalogued in his own mind. Therefore, on a morning since forgotten and for reasons never closely examined, he decided to call it The Control Tower.

II

There was an unholy Friday restlessness upon Dewforth. To make matters worse, it was the last Friday in March. Logically, perhaps, this should not have made any difference because Dewforth worked in one of a number of identical windowless rooms in a building from which all natural rhythms had been rigorously excluded. From skylights high in the ceilings of the drafting rooms came a light which had been pasteurized and was timeless. It could have been artificial.

His work provided no refuge for his thought. It was demanding, but only mechanically so. Strictly speaking, he did not know what he was doing. No one did, apparently. He did not have

the satisfaction of knowing that what he did was real. He filled large sheets of plastic with tracings of intricate, interconnected schematic hieroglyphs. But he knew that in another place a template would be laid over his work. An irregular portion like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle would be cut out of it and the rest, perhaps more than half of his work, would be destroyed.

It was even possible that all of it was destroyed.

Dewforth worked for a firm which made components. Of what, no one said, no one asked. *Components, Inc.*, the firm was called. He knew that the finished products were small, heavy and very complicated. Their names were mute combinations of letters and numbers, joined by hyphens or separated by virgules. Some said that these components performed no functions. Others said that they worked, but their operations corresponded to no known human need. It was known that some of the finished products themselves were destroyed. Some maintained that they were dissolved in vats of hydrofluoric acid. Others argued that they were encased in cement, then taken out to sea in speedboats on moonless nights and jettisoned. The favorite rumor was that the entire firm was a decoy to bewilder agents of

foreign powers and pre-empt their espionage efforts. There was neither proof of this nor evidence to the contrary.

The penalty for circulating this last rumor was immediate dismissal with prejudice.

In another place, another time, Dewforth might have spread the burden of his mood by confiding in other workers, but not under the circumstances so painstakingly arranged by *Components, Inc.* in the interest of what was called *The Interloathing Index*, or I.I. It was an axiom of modern industry that a high I.I. meant high productivity and also tighter security. The latter was as much the measure of the importance of an industry as what it made or how much. That there was design in the egg-box compartmentation of workspaces, for example, was obvious enough. Less overt were the lengths to which Personnel had gone to discourage the exchange of information, or confidences, among employees.

Under the guise of aptitude testing, the psychologists had been able to select and organize teams consisting entirely of mutually incompatible individuals. So well had they succeeded that most workers could barely stand the sight of one another, and so were driven back upon themselves and their work. Only by

practicing an almost egg-like self-containment could a draftsman or other worker hope to get through the day without open conflict and disaster.

Latent antipathies among workers were further intensified by means of the Annual Proficiency Competitions. At the conclusion of these tests all employees save two were given Proficiency Stars. Of the remaining two, one was invariably a person who had shown signs of becoming too popular among his fellows. He was given a Leadership Star, and because an affable man was usually less rather than more efficient than the rest, this made of him a lonely little air-bubble in a sea of resentment.

The second of the two workers was always discharged. Thus a dash of anxiety was added to the proceedings.

The visible manifestations of high I.I. were hectic color, a characteristic ferocity of eye and throbbing jaw-hinges. Often the jaw-hinges of an entire team would be pulsating at once, sometimes even in unison. This spectacle emanated an overwhelming feeling of earnestness and purpose. Executives were fond of pointing out this phenomenon to visiting dignitaries. "Observe their jaw-hinges," they would say.

Another factor which isolated employees from one another was the peculiarly virulent form of halitosis which afflicted all workers without exception. The company cafeteria was the source of this malady.

Thus, if Dewforth had been the only employee in that vast complex of buildings, or in the world, he could not have been restless. Add to this the fact that it had been his misfortune to win the Leadership Star in the Proficiency Competitions only three days earlier. He did not have to trace the bitter stream of his mood any farther back than that to find the bile-source.

The object of the contest had been to draw a single line 28 5/8 inches long and 1/15,000 of an inch thick, a feat which is starkly simple in conception but only theoretically feasible. The draftsmen had spent hours preparing the surfaces of paper, straining ink through filters, honing drawing pens with emery and polishing them with rouge, drawing practice lines and scrutinizing them with powerful bench microscopes. They did Balinese finger exercises, Chinese body coordination exercises, Hindu breathing exercises and Tibetan spiritual calisthenics to dispel their incipient shakes. When the great moment came, a solemn

little group of executives entered the drafting room and stood about in attitudes of grave ceremonial courtesy.

The draftsmen then drew their lines.

When it was over, the judges examined and graded the lines and the scores were announced by Mr. Shrank, the foreman. The better scores prompted little flutters of restrained applause from the executives. This moist and muted sound had reminded Dewforth of a hippopotamus venting its wind under water, and in a moment of thoughtless exhilaration he had even thought of sharing this bizarre notion with his wife. He never did so, as it happened.

Why had he ever told his wife about that wretched Leadership Star? Her laughter persisted through his dreams, or through his dream. He only had one. In this dream she was always a massive machine which ingested songbirds between steel rollers and stamped them into pipe-flange gaskets at a rate of one hundred and twenty per minute.

And the prize-winning line he had drawn—it revealed its true nature in the perspective of days. There was no mistaking what it was. It was The Abyss. It could widen and it could en-

gulf. How much light would a Leadership Star cast in that bottomless inkiness?

Acute restless had the effect of sending Dewforth frequently to the lavatory, not so much for physiological reasons as because there was no other place to go and he had to go somewhere when the white walls of the drafting room threatened to crush him. He went as often as he thought he could without attracting the attention of Mr. Shrank or eliciting ponderous jocosities from the other workers. After several visits, however, he did begin to question himself. What drew him to that bleak refuge again and again? He was not aware of bladder irritation. He had no infantile obsession about such facilities. Was he driven by an aggregation of petty forces, each too small to make sense by itself? Or was there one reason hiding behind a cloud of small rationalizations? There was a difference in the air in the lavatory, and in the sound—the undifferentiated background sound which came from nowhere. Nowhere?

It came through a window.

He had been staring at a window—probably the only one in the building—and it had failed to register on his mind at the time because he had not expected it to be there. It was not part

of the habitual pattern. He had seen a window. He had, moreover, looked through a window. What had he seen? He thought about this, and at the same time he thought about being sick—administratively sick. He succeeded in working up a palpable fever and a windy yawning beneath the diaphragm. Before taking any action he would have to confirm what he had seen through the window of the lavatory.

On his last trip to the lavatory he climbed up onto the slippery washbasin and looked through the high window. His position there would be impossible to explain, of course, if anyone should come in. He was past caring about that. The unpasteurized air made him a little drunk and the sound—the immense distant sighing groan like a giant's whisper—filled his brain. It made him want to expand to meet it somehow.

Only one immense skeleton foot was visible, but there was no question about exactly what it was.

No conventional structure would curve upward in that way. There was no point of reference by which to determine how far away it was, and the air was blue with haze, giving everything an appearance of remoteness and of unreality. He had never seen

the city from that angle before, but if what he saw was what he thought it was, how could it have been so close without his knowing about it before this time? It was a thing which belonged to vast distances—spatial distances and other kinds of distance as well. Now it was close, or he was closer to it than he had ever imagined he would be in his life.

It was accessible.

Dewforth left at half past three when the somnolence of afternoon was heaviest on the heads of the other draftsmen. He did not speak to Mr. Shrank about it. He did not clear with Miss Plock in the dispensary, nor with Mr. Fert in Personnel, nor with Miss Yurt in Wage Readjustment, nor with Miss Bort in Sick Leave Subdivision, nor with Miss Vibe in Special Problems, nor with Mr. Pfister in Sick Claims, nor with Miss Grope in Employee Grievances, nor with Miss Rupnick in Company Grievances, nor with Miss Guggward in Allowance Reductions, nor with Mr. Droon in Privilege Curtailment, nor with Miss Tremulo in Psychological Counseling, nor with Dr. Schreck in Spiritual Aid Subdiv.

He did not even trouble to see Miss Nosemilk who kept the time book.

He just left.

"Nobody goes up there," said the hulking oyster-eyed man in the burlap overcoat.

The bum's eyes cleared long enough for him to peer into Dewforth's eyes in order to see if his madness was worth sharing, then they filmed over again as he decided that it was not.

Dewforth crowded past him and walked on. He was making real progress. He had at last found someone who acknowledged that there was something up there above eye-level. The others—old lost children, figures of scab and grime—had been unaware of anything but inner cavities of craving and fear above the sidewalk firmament of trodden gum disks, sputum stars and the ends of twice-smoked cigarettes.

He could not have lost sight of the Control Tower. He had never realized what streets were. Before that time he had known a single well policed block between the station and his place of work. He still thought of streets as more or less open strips along which people moved, north or south, east or west, purposefully from Point A to Point B with perhaps one right-angle turn, two at the most, pausing only to tip hats or look into shop windows. Now it developed that

streets were sewers, battlegrounds, lairs, abattoirs, cesspools, lazarettes, midways of deformity and brawling markets where nightmares and spirochetes were sold.

The city had not less than three dimensions. He had not been fully prepared for the implications of this, either. Existence in three dimensions does not necessarily mean three-dimensional vision. The sky was not visible through the maze of girders, stairways and catwalks overhead. Dewforth tried to orient himself by the direction of shadows, but this was misleading. It was the heart of the shadow district, and the play of shadows was the order of things. The rules were the rules of phantoms. Flesh lived there in subjection. Long miscegenation with shadow had made phantoms of them all and endowed all shadows with the menace of the real. Everything was equivocal as hell.

Dewforth wandered in a cavern without walls. He saw bulky overcoats with defeated hats or defeated heads; long-legged dwarfs in black leather jackets; willowy chorus-boys with platinum ringlets, waiting in their niches for the gift of violence; scuttling trolls with horse-blanket jackets and alpine hats; deposed patriarchs under the small shelter of black derbies,

hiding from persecution behind the Spanish moss of consolidated beards; headless things and thingless heads, importuning, threatening, watching or just standing there, those that were able.

In his search for a way out of the darkness, he was obliged to turn back time and again. If gangs of shadows fought with knives at the end of a street which had at first looked promising, what business had shadows cursing or screaming or bleeding? If the madman who enjoined the mob to fight in the service of nothingness was only a mouse dancing on a summit of garbage, why did they cheer? At the end of still another street, a mass rape may not have been in progress; the participants many not have waited sullenly in a long line; a macrocephalic gnome in a plaid suit may not actually have moved up and down the line selling tickets at a reduced rate and explaining that the outrage had been in progress since the preceding Christmas Eve; but why was the unreality so consistent?

And if no one was in fact being ravaged, why did everyone look as though they had been?

All these spectacle tested Dewforth's courage, but they dimmed his resolve not at all.

At last he found a deserted street. He followed it and he was rewarded with encouraging signs. There was more birdlime underfoot, and the inhuman yammering of the streets was replaced with echoing silence, and that silence was invaded by the sound—the voice of the colossus, remote and terrible.

Dewforth asked directions again, this time of a pear-shaped figure which may or may not have had legs and which sat in the mouth of an iron cave and smoked what appeared to be a twist of hemp. "Where . . ." Dewforth began.

"Nobody goes up there," the hemp-smoker answered without looking up at him.

"Where do they come down, then," asked Dewforth, trying a new approach but with little hope. There was a long pause. The pear-shaped man didn't have arms either, Dewforth noticed. Hands, but no arms.

"Well now, some got it, some ain't," he said.

"How's that?" asked Dewforth. The pear blew out a cloud of smoke, sulphurous, with viscous strings through it. "I knowed a guy caught it from a drinking glass once."

This dialogue might have gone on much longer if Dewforth had not just then noticed that his noninformer was sitting on the

bottom step of a long, dark stairway which led up and up into a jungle of lacy girders and shadows above them.

He did not bother kicking the pear-shaped man. He stepped over him and ran up the stairs two at a time. His footsteps rang on the iron stairs and carried through the structure. It sounded like the bells of a sunken cathedral ringing in the tide.

On the second level there was more light and more air. It was colder. There were loiterers on the second level too, but these were far from menacing. They clung to things and pressed themselves against things, and they stared with unfocused eyes at something which had been there before but was not there now. These men seemed to be wearing greasy fezzes and dark, baggy long underwear with buttons and vestigial lapels. As he approached them, Dewforth saw that the fezzes were actually felt hats with the brims atrophied or rotted away, and the funereal long-johns were the weather-beaten remains of those suits which are designed for Young Men On The Way Up. As though by tacit agreement of long standing, these men did not look directly at Dewforth as he passed, nor at them.

There was no difficulty about finding a stairway to the next

level, but there was a rusty chain across the entrance.

Dewforth's foot caught in this chain as he stepped over it, and it shattered like a chain of stale pretzels. There were no more people beyond the second level — none that could be seen.

He soon lost count of levels. Stairs became narrower and more heavily encrusted with birdlime and rust as he ascended. In some places there were long sweeping ramps which led to blind sacs or reached out unsupported into space, and he was forced to retrace his steps. At no time did he look down, even when it was possible. There were usually high barriers along the platforms and ramps. These were covered with layers of old advertising posters which peeled and were torn by the wind, revealing still more ancient posters underneath. They seemed to have grown there by themselves like lichen. It seemed entirely reasonable to Dewforth that the writing on the older posters underneath was runic or demotic and the faces were ochre-stained skulls, but his impulse was to hurry past and not study them too closely.

At last he found a long steep ladder running up the outside of one of the legs of the Control Tower. Only huge slow-

ly circling birds and low-flying clouds came between him and the underside of the control house at the top of the structure. Before beginning the climb he admonished himself not to look down and not to ponder what he was doing. In order to keep climbing, however, he had to keep admonishing himself, thereby only reminding himself to look down and to ponder, to the detriment of his equilibrium and confidence. Was it vertigo, or did the ladder or the Tower itself sway in the singing wind? Who was to say that the earth itself did not heave like fermenting mash? Was any object inherently more solid than any other object? What was "stability"?

When he looked down at the city he could not pick out the building in which he had worked. There was nothing in any feature of the landscape. Nothing. If his position, clinging to a girder high above the city, made no sense, it did not make less sense than the position of a man, or a Dewforth, sitting in a blind cell among thousands of other blind cells down there, drawing tiny lines. Nothing bound him to the drafting room nor even to the Dewforth of the drafting room — not so much as a spider web or a shaft of light. The light pointed to itself. The wind got

under his shirt and chilled his navel, a poignant reminder of disconnectedness.

An eagle glided close and screamed at him. It was like the laughter of his wife. He resumed his climb, looking down no more.

The last few yards of the climb were the worst. Some bolts holding the ladder in place were shapeless little masses of rust. The eleventh rung from the top broke under his weight, and for the last ten steps he had to lighten his body by means of a technique of autosuggestion and will-projection which he invented on the spot, demonstrating what could be done under pressure of extreme necessity. He could see above his head a tiny balcony not more than a yard square, at which the ladder terminated. The floor of this balcony appeared to be made of long, weatherbeaten cigars which reason told him were badly corroded iron bars. Reason also told him that there would be a door there.

He could not see a door through the skeleton floor of the balcony, but the idea that there would not be a door there was, under the circumstances, insupportable. There would be a door, he told himself as he made his way upwards by means of levitation and the most tentative of

steps. It would probably have an inhospitable sign on it—NO TRESPASSING, AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY, DANGER or perhaps HIGH VOLTAGE. It might prove to be locked. If so, he would pound on it until some one opened it, he decided.

There was even an outside possibility that no one would be inside. He had never considered that possibility before that time. He decided that it was not time to consider it now.

When Dewforth heaved himself up onto the small projecting platform he felt the ladder give under his feet. It was not just another rung. He saw the entire ladder go curling away into the emptiness like a huge broken spring. Then he lay on the platform face down with his eyes closed, fingers clutching the sill of the door, for a long time.

New sounds invaded his personal darkness as he lay there. He heard bells, buzzers, klaxons, whistles and slamming relays. There were voices from loudspeakers—imperious and hopeless, angry and feeble, impassioned and monotonous, arrogant and anguished—in a synthetic language made up of odd phonemes long since discarded from a thousand other languages. When he looked up he saw no door but only a rectangle of

darkness with erratic flashes of colored light.

Having no choice, he entered on his hands and knees.

IV

Dewforth wandered in a labyrinth of control panels which reached almost to the ceiling, but did not entirely shut out the light. This light was like skimmed milk diffused in shadow. He reasoned that it came from windows, but when he tried to remember whether the control cab had windows he could not be sure. He had no visual image of windows seen from the outside, but he had supposed that such an edifice would hardly be blind. Somewhere beyond this maze of control panels, he also reasoned, there must be an area like the bridge of an enormous ship where the clamor of the bells, buzzers, klaxons and whistles and the silent warnings and importunings of dials, gauges, colored lights, ticker-tapes which spewed from metal mouths, the palsied styles which scribbled on creeping scrolls, were somehow collated and made meaningful, where the yammering loudspeakers could be answered, and where the operators could look out and down and see what they were doing.

Where were the operators?

The noise was deafening. Unlike the noise of machinery in a factory it was not homogenous. Each sound was intended to attract attention and to evoke a certain response, but what response and from whom? Long levers projecting from the steel deck wagged back and forth spasmodically like the legs of monstrous insects struggling on their backs. Several times Dewforth was temporarily blinded by an explosion of blue light as a fuse blew or something short-circuited among the rows of knife-switches and rheostats on the panels. One would never really get used to the sporadic sound or to the lights. There was no knowable pattern about them—about what they did or said. When he closed his eyes and tried to compose himself the words *Out of Control* flashed red against the back of his eyelids, but he told himself that this was foolish. How was one to adjudge a situation to be *Out of Control* when one did not know what constituted control, over what, or by whom? Furthermore, he rebuked himself, if the panels—never mind how many or how forbidding—with their lights, bells, buzzers, switches, relays, dials, gauges, styles, tapes, pointers, rheostats and buttons had any meaning, and in fact if the Tower itself had any meaning at

all, that meaning was *Control*. How arrogant it had been of him to imagine, even briefly, that because he—a green intruder in that high place—had not immediately comprehended what it was all about, the situation must be out of control. *Absurd!*

There were hundreds—perhaps thousands—of little labels attached to the control panels, presumably indicating the functions of the buttons, switches and other controls. Dewforth leaned close and studied these, but found only mute combinations of letters and numbers, joined by hyphens or separated by virgules... They made him feel somewhat more fragile, more round-shouldered and colder, but he resisted despair. It was getting a little darker, though. The skimmed-milk light above him was taking on a bluish tint. He had no way of knowing how long he had wandered among the control panels. His time-sense had always been dependent upon clocks and bells—and upon the arrivals and departures of trains.

It was a sound which finally led Dewforth out of the maze of control panels.

It was not a louder sound, not more emphatic, imperative or clear than the others; it was formless, feeble and ineffably

pathetic. It was its utter incongruity which reached Dewforth through the robotic clamor, and which touched him... a mewling, as of a kitten trapped in a closet.

It came, as he discovered, from The Operator.

He was quite alone among his levers, wheels, switches, buttons, cranks, gauges, lights, bells, buzzers, horns, ticker-tapes, creeping scrolls, barking loudspeakers and cryptic dials. Dewforth saw him sharply silhouetted against a long window through which bluish-gray light poured but through which nothing could be clearly seen from where he stood. The Operator sat on a high, one-legged stool. His head was drawn into his shoulders, which were crumpled things of birdlike bones. His head was bald on top but the fringe was long and wild. He had big simian ears set at right angles to his head and the light shone through them, not pink but yellowish. There was an aureole of fine hairs about them which gave them the appearance of angel's wings. With enlarged hands at the ends of almost fleshless arms he clutched at the knobs of rheostats and the cranks of transformers, hesitantly, spasmodically, and without ever quite reaching anything. Each time he withdrew his hands quickly as though he had been on the point of touch-

ing something very hot. His arms might have been elongated by a lifetime of such aborted movement.

Just as Dewforth began to wonder how his sudden appearance there would affect the old man, feeble and distraught as he already was, the Operator whirled on his stool and stared at Dewforth with eyes so round, so huge and so terrified that the rest of his face was not noticeable at all.

He shouted something that sounded like "Huzzah!" but almost certainly was not, then stiffened, then fell to the steel deck with no more fuss than a bag of corn-husks would have made, and died.

One would think that a windowed control cab or wheelhouse atop the loftiest structure in a city, or in an entire landscape, would afford a man an Olympian view of the world below, and of its people and their activities.

Dewforth must have believed this at one time, but he found that it was not so. The entire lower portion of the windows was covered with thin pages of type-script, mostly yellowed, dusty and curled at the edges — orders, instructions, directives, memoranda, all *Urgent, For Immediate Action, Important, Priority,*

On No Account, or At All Costs.

The texts of these orders, instructions, directives or memoranda consisted of mute combinations of letters and numbers, joined by hyphens or separated by virgules.

Through the upper portion of the windows Dewforth could just make out the horizon and a narrow strip of darkening sky, which were silent and which demanded nothing of him. Amid the continuing clamor of all the signal devices, he tried to recapture the last utterance of the Operator — the former Operator.

"Huzzah!" was out of the question. "Who's there?" or "Who's that?" were more likely, but, as he thought of it, weren't "Whose

what?", "What's where?", "Where's what" or even "Who's where?" just as likely?

Of these possible last words, "Who's where?" echoed most persistently in his memory.

Dewforth might have torn away the pages of meaningless orders and looked down upon lights as darkness fell, but he did not.

Opaque as they were in form and content alike, there was something reassuringly familiar in the lines of inane symbols. And they were all that stood between him and the approaching tidal wave of night, and beyond the night, the winter with its storms.

— WILL MOHLER

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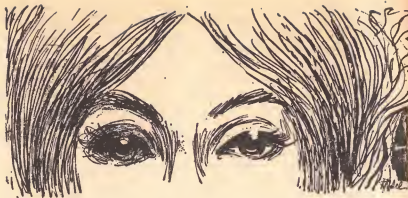
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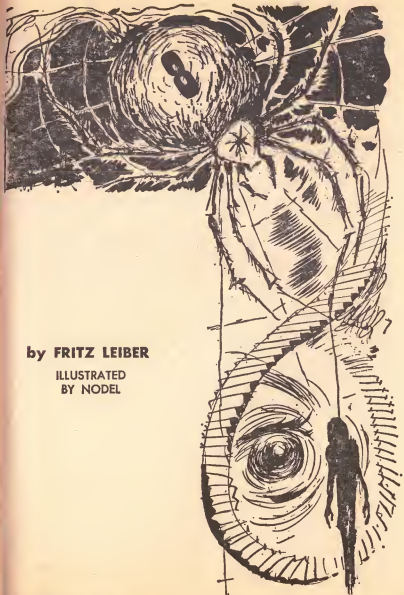
*The troupers of the Big Time
lack no art to sway a crowd
— or to change all history!*

I

To bring the dead to life
Is no great magic.
Few are wholly dead:
Blow on a dead man's em-
bers
And a live flame will start.
—Graves

I dipped through the filmy
curtain into the boys' half
of the dressing room and there
was Sid sitting at the star's
dressing table in his threadbare
yellowed undershirt, the lucky
one, not making up yet but star-
ing sternly at himself in the
bulb-framed mirror and experi-

GALAXY



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ILLUSTRATED
BY NODEL

NO GREAT MAGIC

mentally working his features a little, as actors will, and kneading the stubble on his fat chin.

I said to him quietly, "Siddy, what are we putting on tonight? Maxwell Anderson's *Elizabeth the Queen* or Shakespeare's *Macbeth*? It says *Macbeth* on the callboard, but Miss Nefer's getting ready for Elizabeth. She just had me go and fetch the red wig."

He tried out a few eyebrow rears—right, left, both together—then turned to me, sucking in his big gut a little, as he always does when a gal heaves in to hailing distance, and said, "Your pardon, sweetling, what sayest thou?"

Sid always uses that kook antique patter backstage, until I sometimes wonder whether I'm in Central Park, New York City, nineteen hundred and three quarters, or somewhere in Southwark, Merry England, fifteen hundred and same. The truth is that although he loves every last fat part in Shakespeare and will play the skinniest one with loyal and inspired affection, he thinks Willy S. penned Falstaff with nobody else in mind but Sidney J. Lessingham. (And no accent on the ham, please.)

I closed my eyes and counted to eight, then repeated my question.

He replied, "Why, the Bard's

tragic history of the bloody Scot, certes." He waved his hand toward the portrait of Shakespeare that always sits beside his mirror on top of his reserve makeup box. At first that particular picture of the Bard looked too nancy to me—a sort of peeping-tom schoolteacher—but I've grown used to it over the months and even palsy-feeling.

He didn't ask me why I hadn't asked Miss Nefer my question. Everybody in the company knows she spends the hour before curtain-time getting into character, never parting her lips except for that purpose—or to bite your head off if you try to make the most necessary conversation.

"Aye, 'tíz *Macbeth* tonight," Sid confirmed, returning to his frowning-practice: left eyebrow up, right down, reverse, repeat, rest. "And I must play the ill-starred Thane of Glamis."

I said, "That's fine, Siddy, but where does it leave us with Miss Nefer? She's already thinned her eyebrows and beaked out the top of her nose for Queen Liz, though that's as far as she's got. A beautiful job, the nose. Anybody else would think it was plastic surgery instead of putty. But it's going to look kind of funny on the Thaness of Glamis."

Sid hesitated a half second longer than he usually would—I thought, his *timing's off tonight*—and then he harumphed and said, "Why, Iris Nefer, decked out as Good Queen Bess, will speak a prologue to the play—a prologue which I have myself but last week writ." He owled his eyes. "'Tis an experiment in the new theater."

I said, "Siddy, prologues were nothing new to Shakespeare. He had them on half his other plays. Besides, it doesn't make sense to use Queen Elizabeth. She was dead by the time he whipped up *Macbeth*, which is all about witchcraft and directed at King James."

He growled a little at me and demanded, "Prithee, how comes it your peewit-brain bears such a ballast of fusty book-knowledge, chit?"

I said softly, "Siddy, you don't camp in a Shakespearean dressing room for a year, tete-a-teting with some of the wisest actors ever, without learning a little. Sure I'm a mental case, a poor little A & A existing on your sweet charity, and don't think I don't appreciate it, but—"

"A-and-A, thou sayest?" he frowned. "Methinks the glad-some new forswearers of sack and ale call themselves AA."

"Agoraphobe and Amnesiac," I told him. "But look, Siddy, I

was going to sayest that I do know the plays. Having Queen Elizabeth speak a prologue to *Macbeth* is as much an anachronism as if you put her on the gantry of the British moonship, busting a bottle of champagne over its schnozzle."

"Ha!" he cried as if he'd caught me out. "And saying there's a new Elizabeth, wouldn't that be the bravest advertisement ever for the Empire?—perchance rechristening the pilot, copilot and astrogator Drake, Hawkins and Raleigh? And the ship *The Golden Hind*? Tilly fally, lady!"

He went on, "My prologue an anachronism, quotha! The groundlings will never mark it. Think'st thou wisdom came to mankind with the stenchful rocket and the sundered atomy? More, the Bard himself was top-full of anachronism. He put spectacles on King Lear, had clocks tolling the hour in Caesar's Rome, buried that Roman 'stead o' burning him and gave Czechoslovakia a seacoast. Go to, doll."

"Czechoslovakia, Siddy?"

"Bohemia, then, what skills it? Leave me now, sweet poppet. Go thy ways. I have matters of import to ponder. There's more to running a repertory company than reading the footnotes to *Furness*."

Martin had just slouched by calling the Half Hour and looking in his solemnity, sneakers, levis and dirty T-shirt more like an underage refugee from Skid Row than Sid's newest recruit, assistant stage manager and hardest-worked juvenile—though for once he'd remembered to shave. I was about to ask Sid who was going to play Lady Mack if Miss Nefer wasn't, or, if she were going to double the roles, shouldn't I help her with the change? She's a slow dresser and the Elizabeth costumes are pretty realistically stayed. And she would have trouble getting off that nose, I was sure. But then I saw that Siddy was already slapping on the alboline to keep the grease paint from getting into his pores.

Greta, you ask too many questions, I told myself. You get everybody riled up and you rack your own poor rickety little mind; and I hied myself off to the costumery to settle my nerves.

The costumery, which occupies the back end of the dressing room, is exactly the right place to settle the nerves and warm the fancies of any child, including an unraveled adult who's saving what's left of her sanity by pretending to be one. To begin with there are the regular costumes for Shakespeare's

plays, all jeweled and spangled and brocaded, stage armor, great Roman togas with weights in the borders to make them drape right, velvets of every color to rest your cheek against and dream, and the fantastic costumes for the other plays we favor; Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* and Hilliard's adaptation of Heinlein's *Children of Methuselah*, the Cape brothers' *Insect People*, O'Neill's *The Fountain*, Flecker's *Hassan*, *Camino Real*, *Children of the Moon*, *The Beggar's Opera*, *Mary of Scotland*, *Berkeley Square*, *The Road to Rome*.

There are also the costumes for all the special and variety performances we give of the plays: *Hamlet* in modern dress, *Julius Caesar* set in a dictatorship of the 1920's, *The Taming of the Shrew* in caveman furs and leopard skins, where Petruchio comes in riding a dinosaur, *The Tempest* set on another planet with a spaceship wreck to start it off *Karrumph!*—which means a half dozen spacesuits, featherweight but looking ever so practical, and the weirdest sort of extraterrestrial-beast outfits for Ariel and Caliban and the other monsters.

Oh, I tell you the stuff in the costumery ranges over such a sweep of space and time that you sometimes get frightened

you'll be whirled up and spun off just anywhere, so that you have to clutch at something very real to you to keep it from happening and to remind you where you *really* are—as I did now at the subway token on the thin gold chain around my neck (Siddy's first gift to me that I can remember) and chanted very softly to myself, like a charm or a prayer, closing my eyes and squeezing the holes in the token: "Columbus Circle, Times Square, Penn Station, Christopher Street..."

But you don't ever get *really* frightened in the costumery. Not exactly, though your goosehairs get wonderfully realistically tingled and your tummy chilled from time to time—because you know it's all make-believe, a lifesize doll world, a children's dress-up world. It gets you thinking of far-off times and scenes as *pleasant* places and not as black hungry mouths that might gobble you up and keep you forever. It's always safe, always *just in the theatre, just on the stage*, no matter how far it seems to plunge and roam...and the best sort of therapy for a pot-holed mind like mine, with as many gray ruts and curves and gaps as its cerebrum, that can't remember one single thing before this last year in the

dressing room and that can't ever push its shaking body out of that same motherly fatherly room, except to stand in the wings for a scene or two and watch the play until the fear gets too great and the urge to take just one peek at *the audience* gets too strong...and I remember what happened the two times I *did* peek, and I have to come scuttling back.

The costumery's good occupational therapy for me, too, as my pricked and calloused fingertips testify. I think I must have stitched up or darned half the costumes in it this last twelvemonth, though there are so many of them that I swear the drawers have accordion pleats and the racks extend into the fourth dimension—not to mention the boxes of props and the shelves of scripts and prompt-copies and other books, including a couple of encyclopedias and the many thick volumes of *Furness's Variorum Shakespeare*, which as Sid had guessed I'd been boning up on. Oh, and I've sponged and pressed enough costumes, too, and even refitted them to newcomers like Martin, ripping up and resewing seams, which can be a punishing job with heavy materials.

In a less sloppily organized company I'd be called wardrobe mistress, I guess. Except that to

anyone in show business that suggests a crotchety old dame with lots of authority and scissors hanging around her neck on a string. Although I got my crochets, all right, I'm not that old. Kind of childish, in fact. As for authority, everybody outranks me, even Martin.

Of course to somebody *outside* show business, wardrobe mistress might suggest a yummy gal who spends her time dressing up as Nell Gwyn or Anitra or Mrs. Pinchwife or Cleopatra or even Eve (we got a legal costume for it) and inspiring the boys. I've tried that once or twice. But Sidy frowns on it, and if Miss Nefer ever caught me at it I think she'd whang me.

And in a normaller company it would be the wardrobe room, too, but costumery is my infantile name for it and the actors go along with my little whims.

I don't mean to suggest our company is completely crackers. To get as close to Broadway even as Central Park you got to have something. But in spite of Sid's whip-cracking there is a comforting looseness about its efficiency — people trade around the parts they play without fuss, the bill may be changed a half hour before curtain without anybody getting hysterics, nobody gets fired for eating garlic and breathing it in the leading lady's

face. In short, we're a team. Which is funny when you come to think of it, as Sid and Miss Nefer and Bruce and Maudie are British (Miss Nefer with a touch of Eurasian blood, I romance); Martin and Beau and me are American (at least I *think* I am) while the rest come from just everywhere.

Besides my costumery work, I fetch things and run inside errands and help the actresses dress and the actors too. The dressing room's very coeducational in a halfway respectable way. And every once in a while Martin and I police up the whole place, me skittering about with dustcloth and wastebasket, he wielding the scrub-brush and mop with such silent grim efficiency that it always makes me nervous to get through and duck back into the costumery to collect myself.

Yes, the costumery's a great place to quiet your nerves or improve your mind or even dream your life away. But this time I couldn't have been there eight minutes when Miss Nefer's Elizabeth-anxious voice came skirling, "Girl! Girl! Greta, where is my ruff with silver trim?" I laid my hands on it in a flash and loped it to her, because Old Queen Liz was known to slap even her Maids

of Honor around a bit now and then and Miss Nefer is a bear on getting into character — a real Paul Muni.

She was all made up now, I was happy to note, at least as far as her face went — I hate to see that spooky eight-spoked faint tattoo on her forehead (I've sometimes wondered if she got it acting in India or Egypt maybe).

Yes, she was already all made up. This time she'd been going extra heavy on the burrowing-into-character bit, I could tell right away, even if it was only for a hacked-out anachronistic prologue. She signed to me to help her dress without even looking at me, but as I got busy I looked at *her* eyes. They were so cold and sad and lonely (maybe because they were so far away from her eyebrows and temples and small tight mouth, and so shut away from each other by that ridge of nose) that I got the creeps. Then she began to murmur and sigh, very softly at first, then loudly enough so I got the sense of it.

"Cold, so cold," she said, still seeing things far away though her hands were working smoothly with mine. "Even a gallop hardly fires my blood. Never was such a Januarius, though there's no snow. Snow will not come, or tears. Yet my brain

burns with the thought of Mary's death-warrant unsigned. There's my particular hell! — to doom, perchance, all future queens, or leave a hole for the Spaniard and the Pope to creep like old worms back into the sweet apple of England. Philip's tall black crooked ships massing like sea-going fortresses south-away — cragged castles set to march into the waves. Parma in the Lowlands! And all the while my bright young idiot gentlemen spurring out my treasure as if it were so much water, as if gold pieces were a glut of summer posies. Oh, alackanight!"

And I thought, *Cry Iced! — that's sure going to be one tyrannosaur of a prologue. And how you'll ever shift back to being Lady Mack beats me. Greta, if this is what it takes to do just a bit part, you'd better give up your secret ambition of playing walk-ons some day when your nerves heal.*

She was really getting to me, you see, with that characterization. It was as if I'd managed to go out and take a walk and sat down in the park outside and heard the President talking to himself about the chances of war with Russia and realized he'd sat down on a bench with its back to mine and only a bush between. You see,

here we were, two females undignifiedly twisted together, at the moment getting her into that crazy crouch-deep bodice that's like a big icecream cone, and yet here at the same time was Queen Elizabeth the First of England, three hundred and umpty-ump years dead, coming back to life in a Central Park dressing room. It shook me.

She looked so much the part, you see—even without the red wig yet, just powdered pale makeup going back to a quarter of an inch from her own short dark bang combed and netted back tight. The age too. Miss Nefer can't be a day over forty—well, forty-two at most—but now she looked and talked and felt to my hands dressing her, well, at least a dozen years older. I guess when Miss Nefer gets into character she does it with each molecule.

That age point fascinated me so much that I risked asking her a question. Probably I was figuring that she couldn't do me much damage because of the positions we happened to be in at the moment. You see, I'd started to lace her up and to do it right I had my knee against the tail of her spine.

"How old, I mean how young might your majesty be?" I asked her, innocently wondering like some dumb serving wench.

For a wonder she didn't somehow swing around and clout me, but only settled into character a little more deeply.

"Fifty-four winters," she replied dismally. "'Tiz Januarius of Our Lord's year One Thousand and Five Hundred and Eighty and Seven. I sit cold in Greenwich, staring at the table where Mary's death warrant waits only my sign manual. If I send her to the block, I open the doors to future, less official regicides. But if I doom her not, Philip's armada will come inching up the Channel in a season, puffing smoke and shot, and my English Catholics, thinking only of Mary Regina, will rise and i' the end the Spaniard will have all. All history would alter. That must not be, even if I'm damned for it! And yet...and yet..."

A bright blue fly came buzzing along (the dressing room has some insect life) and slowly circled her head rather close, but she didn't even flicker her eyelids.

"I sit cold in Greenwich, going mad. Each afternoon I ride, praying for some mischance, some prodigy, to wash from my mind away the bloody question for some little space. It skills not what: a fire, a tree a-falling, Davison or e'en Eyes Leicester tumbled with his horse, an assassin's ball clipping the cold twigs

by my ear, a maid crying rape, a wild boar charging with dipping tusks, news of the Spaniard at Thames' mouth or, more happily, a band of strolling actors setting forth some new comedy to charm the fancy or some great unheard-of tragedy to tear the heart—though that were somewhat much to hope for at this season and place, even if Southwark be close by."

The lacing was done. I stood back from her, and really she looked so much like Elia-beth painted by Gheeraerts or on the Great Seal of Ireland or something—though the ash-colored plush dress trimmed in silver and the little silver-edge ruff and the black-silver tinsel-cloth cloak lined with white plush hanging behind her looked most like a winter riding costume—and her face was such a pale frozen mask of Elizabeth's inward tortures, that I told myself, *Oh, I got to talk to Siddy again, he's made some big mistake, the lardy old lackwit, Miss Nefer just can't be figuring on playing in Macbeth tonight.*

As a matter of fact I was nervous myself to ask her all about it direct, though it was going to take some real nerve and maybe be risking broken bones or at least a flayed cheek to break the ice of that characterization,

when who should come by calling the Fifteen Minutes but Martin. He looked so downright goofy that it took my mind off Nefer-in-character for all of eight seconds.

His levied bottom half still looked like *The Lower Depths*. Martin is Village Stanislavsky rather than Ye Olde English Stage Traditions. But above that...well, all it really amounted to was that he was stripped to the waist and had shaved off the small high tuft of chest hair and was wearing a black wig that hung down in front of his shoulders in two big braids heavy with silver hoops and pins. But just the same those simple things, along with his tarpaper-solarium tan and habitual poker expression, made him look so like an American Indian that I thought, *Hey Zeus!—he's all set to play Hiawatha, or if he'd just cover up that straight-line chest, a frowny Pocahontas.* And I quick ran through what plays with Indian parts we do and could only come up with *The Fountain*.

I mutely goggled my question at him, wiggling my hands like guppy fins, but he brushed me off with a solemn mysterious smile and backed through the curtain. I thought, *nobody can explain this but Siddy*, and I followed Martin.

History does not move in
one current,
like the wind across bare
seas,
but in a thousand streams
and eddies,
like the wind over a broken
landscape.

— Cary

The boys' half of the dressing room (two-thirds really) was bustling. There was the smell of spirit gum and Max Factor and just plain men. Several guys were getting dressed or un-, and Bruce was cussing Bloody-something because he'd just burnt his fingers unwinding from the neck of a hot electric bulb some crepe hair he'd wound there to dry after wetting and stretching it to turn it from crinkly to straight for his Banquo beard. Bruce is always getting to the theater late and trying short-cuts.

But I had eyes only for Sid. So help me, as soon as I saw him they bugged again. *Greta*, I told myself, *you're going to have to send Martin out to the drugstore for some anti-bug powder. "For the roaches, boy? "No, for the eyes."*

Sid was made up and had his long mustaches and elf-locked Macbeth wig on — and his cor-

set too. I could tell by the way his waist was sucked in before he saw me. But instead of dark kilts and that bronze-studded sweat-stained leather battle harness that lets him show off his beefy shoulders and the top half of his heavily furred chest — and which really does look great on Macbeth in the first act when he comes in straight from battle — but instead of that he was wearing, so help me, red tights cross-gartered with strips of gold-blue tinsel-cloth, a green doublet gold-trimmed and to top it a ruff, and he was trying to fit onto his front a bright silver-ed cuirass that would have looked just dandy maybe on one of the Pope's Swiss Guards.

I thought, *Siddy, Willy S. ought to reach out of his portrait there and bop you one on the koko for contemplating such a crazy-quilt desecration of just about his greatest and certainly his most atmospheric play.*

Just then he noticed me and hissed accusingly, "There thou art, slothy minx! Spring to and help stuff me into this monstrous chest-kettle."

"Siddy, what is all this?" I demanded as my hands automatically obeyed. "Are you going to play *Macbeth* for laughs, except maybe leaving the Porter a serious character? You think you're Red Skelton?"



"What monstrous brabble is this, you mad bitch?" he retorted, grunting as I bear-hugged his waist, shouldering the cuirass to squeeze it home.

"The clown costumes on all you men," I told him, for now I'd noticed that the others were in rainbow hues, Bruce a real eye-buster in yellow tights and violet doublet as he furiously bushed out and clipped cross-wise sections of beard and slapped them on his chin gleaming brown with spirit gum. "I haven't seen any eight-inch polka-dots yet but I'm sure I will."

Suddenly a big grin split Sid's face and he laughed out loud at me, though the laugh changed to a gasp as I strapped in the cuirass three notches too tight. When we'd got that adjusted he said, "T'faith thou slayest me, pretty witting. Did I not tell you this production is an experiment, a novelty? We shall but show *Macbeth* as it might have been costumed at the court of King James. In the the clothes of the day, but gaudier, as was then the stage fashion. Hold, dove, I've somewhat for thee." He fumbled his grouch bag from under his doublet and dipped finger and thumb in it, and put in my palm a silver model of the Empire State Building, charm bracelet

size, and one of the new Kennedy dimes.

As I squeezed those two and gloated my eyes on them, feeling securer and happier and friendlier for them though I didn't at the moment want to, I thought, *Well, Sid's right about that, at least I've read they used to costume the plays that way, though I don't see how Shakespeare stood it. But it was dirty of them all not to tell me beforehand.*

But that's the way it is. Sometimes I'm the butt as well as the pet of the dressing room, and considering all the breaks I get I shouldn't mind. I smiled at Sid and went on tiptoes and necked out my head and kissed him on a powdery cheek just above an aromatic mustache. Then I wiped the smile off my face and said, "Okay, Sid, play *Macbeth* as Little Lord Fauntleroy or Baby Snooks if you want to. I'll never squeak again. But the Elizabeth prologue's still an anachronism. And—this is the thing I came to tell you, Sid—Miss Nefer's not getting ready for any measly prologue. She's set to play Queen Elizabeth all night and tomorrow morning too. Whatever you think, *she* doesn't know we're doing *Macbeth*. But who'll do Lady Mack if she doesn't? And

Martin's not dressing for Malcolm, but for the Son of the Last of the Mohicans, I'd say. What's more—"

You know, something I said must have annoyed Sid, for he changed his mood again in a flash. "Shut your jaw, you crook brained cat, and begone!" he snarled at me. "Here's curtain time close upon us, and you come like a wittol scattering your mad questions like the crazed Ophelia her flowers. Begone, I say!"

"Yessir," I whipped out softly. I skittered off toward the door to the stage, because that was the easiest direction. I figured I could do with a breath of less grease-painty air. Then, "Oh, Greta," I heard Martin call nicely.

He'd changed his levis for black tights, and was stepping into and pulling up around him a very familiar dress, dark green and embroidered with silver and stage-rubies. He'd safety-pinned a folded towel around his chest—to make a bosom of sorts, I realized.

He armed into the sleeves and turned his back to me. "Hook me up, would you?" he entreated.

Then it hit me. They had no actresses in Shakespeare's day, they used boys. And the dark green dress was so familiar to me because—

"Martin," I said, halfway up the hooks and working fast—Miss Nefer's costume fitted him fine. "You're going to play—?"

"Lady Macbeth, yes," he finished for me. "Wish me courage, will you Greta? Nobody else seems to think I need it."

I punched him half-heartedly in the rear. Then, as I fastened the last hooks, my eyes topped his shoulder and I looked at our faces side by side in the mirror of his dressing table. His, in spite of the female edging and him being at least eight years younger than me, I think, looked wise, poised, infinitely resourceful with power in reserve, very very real, while mine looked like that of a bewildered and characterless child ghost about to scatter into air—and the edges of my charcoal sweater and skirt, contrasting with his strong colors, didn't dispel that last illusion.

"Oh, by the way, Greta," he said, "I picked up a copy of *The Village Times* for you. There's a thumbnail review of our *Measure for Measure*, though it mentions no names, darn it. It's around here somewhere..."

But I was already hurrying on. Oh, it was logical enough to have Martin playing Mrs. Macbeth in a production styled to Shakespeare's own times

(though pedantically over-authentic, I'd have thought) and it really did answer all my questions, even why Miss Nefer could sink herself wholly in Elizabeth tonight if she wanted to. But it meant that I must be missing so much of what was going on right around me, in spite of spending 24 hours a day in the dressing room, or at most in the small adjoining john or in the wings of the stage just outside the dressing room door, that it scared me. Sidy telling everybody, "*Macbeth* tonight in Elizabethan costume, boys and girls," sure, that I could have missed — though you'd have thought he'd have asked my help on the costumes.

But Martin getting up in Mrs. Mack. Why, someone must have held the part on him twenty-eight times, cueing him, while he got the lines. And there must have been at least a couple of run-through rehearsals to make sure he had all the business and stage movements down pat, and Sid and Martin would have been doing their big scenes every backstage minute. They could spare with Sid yelling, "Witling! Think'st *that's* a wifely buss?" and Martin would have been droning his lines last time he scrubbed and mopped...

Greta, they're hiding things from you, I told myself.

Maybe there was a 25th hour nobody had told me about yet when they did all the things they didn't tell me about.

Maybe they were things they didn't dare tell me because of my top-storey weakness.

I felt a cold draft and shivered and I realized I was at the door to the stage.

I should explain that our stage is rather an unusual one, in that it can face two ways, with the drops and set pieces and lighting all capable of being switched around completely. To your left, as you look out the dressing-room door, is an open-air theater, or rather an open-air place for the audience — a large upward-sloping glade walled by thick tall trees and with benches for over two thousand people. On that side the stage kind of merges into the grass and can be made to look part of it by a green groundcloth.

To your right is a big roofed auditorium with the same number of seats.

The whole thing grew out of the free summer Shakespeare performances in Central Park that they started back in the 1950's.

The Janus-stage idea is that in nice weather you can have the audience outdoors, but if it rains

or there's a cold snap, or if you want to play all winter without a single break, as we've been doing, then you can put your audience in the auditorium. In that case, a big accordion-pleated wall shuts off the out of doors and keeps the wind from blowing your backdrop, which is on that side, of course, when the auditorium's in use.

Tonight the stage was set up to face the outdoors, although that draft felt mighty chilly.

I hesitated, as I always do at the door to the stage — though it wasn't the actual stage lying just ahead of me, but only backstage, the wings. You see, I always have to fight the feeling that if I go out the dressing room door, go out just eight steps, the world will change while I'm out there and I'll never be able to get back. It won't be New York City any more, but Chicago or Mars or Algiers or Atlanta, Georgia, or Atlantis or Hell and I'll never be able to get back to that lovely warm womb with all the jolly boys and girls and all the costumes smelling like autumn leaves.

Or, especially when there's a cold breeze blowing, I'm afraid that I'll change, that I'll grow wrinkled and old in eight footsteps, or shrink down to the witless blob of a baby, or forget altogether who I am —

— or, it occurred to me for the first time now, *remember* who I am. Which might be even worse.

Maybe that's what I'm afraid of.

I took a step back. I noticed something new just beside the door: a high-legged, short-keyboard piano. Then I saw that the legs were those of a table. The piano was just a box with yellowed keys. Spinet? Harpsichord?

"Five minutes, everybody," Martin quietly called out behind me.

I took hold of myself. *Greta, I told myself — also for the first time, you know that some day you're really going to have to face this thing, and not just for a quick dip out and back either. Better get in some practice.*

I stepped through the door.

Beau and Doc were already out there, made up and in costume for Ross and King Duncan. They were discreetly peering past the wings at the gathering audience. Or at the place where the audience ought to be gathering, at any rate — sometimes the movies and girlie shows and brainheavy beatnik bruhahas outdraw us altogether. Their costumes were the same kooky colorful ones as the others'. Doc had a mock-ermine

robe and a huge gilt papier-mache crown. Beau was carrying a ragged black robe and hood over his left arm—he doubles the First Witch.

As I came up behind them, making no noise in my black sneakers, I heard Beau say, "I see some rude fellows from the City approaching. I was hoping we wouldn't get any of those. How should they scent us out?"

Brother, I thought, *where do you expect them to come from if not the City? Central Park is bounded on three sides by Manhattan Island and on the fourth by the Eighth Avenue Subway. And Brooklyn and Bronx boys have got pretty sharp scents. And what's it get you insulting the woiking and non-woiking people of the world's greatest metropolis? Be grateful for any audience you get, boy.*

But I suppose Beau Lassiter considers anybody from north of Vicksburg a "rude fellow" and is always waiting for the day when the entire audience will arrive in carriage and democrat wagons.

Doc replied, holding down his white beard and heavy on the mongrel Russo-German accent he miraculously manages to suppress on stage except when "Vot does it matter? Ve don't convinze zem, ve don't convinze nobody. Nichevo."

Maybe, I thought, Doc shares my doubts about making Macbeth plausible in rainbow pants.

Still unobserved by them, I looked between their shoulders and got the first of my shocks.

It wasn't night at all, but afternoon. A dark cold lowering afternoon, admittedly. But afternoon all the same.

Sure, between shows I sometimes forget whether it's day or night, living inside like I do. But getting matinees and evening performances mixed in something else again.

It also seemed to me, although Beau was leaning in now and I couldn't see so well, that the glade was smaller than it should be, the trees closer to us and more irregular, and I couldn't see the benches. That was Shock Two.

Beau said anxiously, glancing at his wrist, "I wonder what's holding up the Queen?"

Although I was busy keeping up nerve-pressure against the shocks, I managed to think, *So he knows about Sidy's stupid Queen Elizabeth prologue too. But of course he would. It's only me they keep in the dark. If he's so smart he ought to remember that Miss Nefer is always the last person on stage, even when she opens the play.*

And then I thought I heard, through the trees, the distant

drumming of horses' hoofs and the sound of a horn.

Now they do have horseback riding in Central Park and you can hear auto horns there, but the hoofbeats don't drum that wild way. And there aren't so many riding together. And no auto horn I ever heard gave out with that sweet yet imperious *ta-ta-ta-TA*.

I must have squeaked or something, because Beau and Doc turned around quickly, blocking my view, their expressions half angry, half anxious.

I turned too and ran for the dressing room, for I could feel one of my mind-wavery fits coming on. At the last second it had seemed to me that the scenery was getting skimpier, hardly more than thin trees and bushes itself, and underfoot feeling more like ground than a ground cloth, and overhead not theater roof but gray sky. *Shock Three and you're out, Gerta*, my umpire was calling.

I made it through the dressing room door and nothing there was wavering or dissolving, praised be Pan. Just Martin standing with his back to me, alert, alive, poised like a cat inside that green dress, the prompt book in his right hand with a finger in it, and from his left hand long black tatters swing-

ing—telling me he'd still be doubling Second Witch. And he was hissing, "Places, please, everybody. On stage!"

With a sweep of silver and ash-colored plush, Miss Nefer came past him, for once leading the last-minute hurry to the stage. She had on the dark red wig now. For me that crowned her characterization. It made me remember her saying, "My brain burns." I ducked aside as if she were majesty incarnate.

And then she didn't break her own precedent. She stopped at the new thing beside the door and poised her long white skinny fingers over the yellowed keys, and suddenly I remembered what it was called: a virginals.

She stared down at it fiercely, evilly, like a witch planning an enchantment. Her face got the secret fiendish look that, I told myself, the real Elizabeth would have had ordering the deaths of Ballard and Babington, or plotting with Drake (for all they say she didn't) one of his raids, that long long forefinger tracing crooked courses through a crabbedly drawn map of the Indies and she smiling at the dots of cities that would burn.

Then all her eight fingers came flickering down and the strings inside the virginals began to twang and hum with a high-pitched rendering of Grieg's

"In the Hall of the Mountain King."

Then as Sid and Bruce and Martin rushed past me, along with a black swooping that was Maud already robed and hooded for Third Witch, I beat it for my sleeping closet like Peer Gynt himself dashing across the mountainside away from the cave of the Troll King, who only wanted to make tiny slits in his eyeballs so that forever afterwards he'd see reality just a little differently. And as I ran, the master-anachronism of that menacing mad march music was shrilling in my ears.

III

Sound a dumbe shew. Enter the three fatall sisters, with a rocke, a threeed, and a pair of sheeres.

—Old Play

My sleeping closet is just a cot at the back end of the girls' third of the dressing room, with a three-panel screen to make it private.

When I sleep I hang my outside clothes on the screen, which is pasted and thumbtacked all over with the New York City stuff that gives me security: theater programs and restaurant menus, clippings from the *Times* and the *Mirror*, a torn-out pic-

ture of the United Nations building with a hundred tiny gay paper flags pasted around it, and hanging in an old hairnet a home-run baseball autographed by Willy Mays. Things like that.

Right now I was jumping my eyes over that stuff, asking it to keep me located and make me safe, as I lay on my cot in my clothes with my knees drawn up and my fingers over my ears so the louder lines from the play wouldn't be able to come nosing back around the trunks and tables and bright-lit mirrors and find me. Generally I like to listen to them, even if they're sort of sepulchral and drained of overtones by their crooked trip. But they're always tense-making. And tonight (I mean this afternoon) — no!

It's funny I should find security in mementos of a city I daren't go out into — no, not even for a stroll through Central Park, though I know it from the Pond to Harlem Meer — the Met Museum, the Menagerie, the Ramble, the Great Lawn, Cleopatra's Needle and all the rest. But that's the way it is. Maybe I'm like Jonah in the whale, reluctant to go outside because the whale's a terrible monster that's awful scary to look in the face and might really damage you gulping you a second time, yet reassured to know you're living

in the stomach of that particular monster and not a seventeen tentacled one from the fifth planet of Aldebaran.

It's really true, you see, about me actually living in the dressing room. The boys bring me meals: coffee in cardboard cylinders and doughnuts in little brown grease-spotted paper sacks and malts and hamburgers and apples and little pizzas, and Maud brings me raw vegetables — carrots and parsnips and little onions and such, and watches to make sure I exercise my molars grinding them and get my vitamins. I take spit-baths in the little john. Architects don't seem to think actors ever take baths, even when they've browned themselves all over playing Pindarus the Parthian in *Julius Caesar*. And all my shut-eye is caught on this little cot in the twilight of my NYC screen.

You'd think I'd be terrified being alone in the dressing room during the wee and morning hours, let alone trying to sleep then, but that isn't the way it works out. For one thing, there's apt to be someone sleeping in too. Maudie especially. And it's my favorite time too for costume-mending and reading the *Variorum* and other books, and for just plain way-

out dreaming. You see, the dressing room is the one place I really do feel safe. Whatever is out there in New York that terrorizes me, I'm pretty confident that it can never get in here.

Besides that, there's a great big bolt on the inside of the dressing room door that I throw whenever I'm all alone after the show. Next day they buzz for me to open it.

I worried me a bit at first and I had asked Sid, "But what if I'm so deep asleep I don't hear and you have to get in fast?" and he had replied, "Sweetie, a word in your ear: our own Beauregard Lassiter is the prettiest picklock unjailed since Jimmy Valentine and Jimmy Dale. I'll not ask where he learned his trade, but 'tis sober truth, upon my honor."

And Beau had confirmed this with a courtly bow, murmuring, "At your service, Miss Greta."

"How do you jigger a big iron bolt through a three-inch door that fits like Maudie's tights?" I wanted to know.

"He carries lodestones of great power and divers subtle tools," Sid had explained for him.

I don't know how they work it so that some Traverse-Three cop or park official doesn't find out about me and raise a stink. Maybe Sid just throws a little more of the temperament he uses to

keep most outsiders out of the dressing-room. We sure don't get any janitors or scrubwomen, as Martin and I know only too well. More likely he squares someone. I do get the impression all the company's gone a little way out on a limb letting me stay here — that the directors of our theater wouldn't like it if they found out about me.

In fact, the actors are all so good about helping me and putting up with my antics (though they have their own, Danu digs!) that I sometimes think I must be related to one of them — a distant cousin or sister-in-law (or wife, my God!), because I've checked our faces side by side in the mirrors often enough and I can't find any striking family resemblances. Or maybe I was even an actress in the company. The least important one. Playing the tiniest roles like Lucius in *Caesar* and Bianca in *Othello* and one of the little princes in *Dick the Three Eyes* and Fleance and the Gentlewoman in *Macbeth*, though me doing even that much acting strikes me to laugh.

But whatever I am in that direction — if I'm anything — not one of the actors has told me a word about it or dropped the least hint. Not even when I beg them to tell me or try to trick them into it, presumably be-

cause it might revive the shock that gave me agoraphobia and amnesia in the first place, and maybe this time knock out my entire mind or at least smash the new mouse-in-a-hole consciousness I've made for myself.

I guess they must have got by themselves a year ago and talked me over and decided my best chance for cure or for just bumping along half happily was staying in the dressing room rather than being sent home (funny, could I have another?) or to a mental hospital. And then they must have been cocky enough about their amateur psychiatry and interested enough in me (the White Horse knows why) to go ahead with a program almost any psychiatrist would be bound to yike at.

I got so worried about the set up once and about the risks they might be running that, gritting down my dread of the idea, I said to Sid, "Siddy, shouldn't I see a doctor?"

He looked at me solemnly for a couple of seconds and then said, "Sure, why not? Go talk to Doc right now," tipping a thumb toward Doc Pyeskov, who was just sneaking back into the bottom of his makeup box what looked like a half pint of the flash I got. I did, incidentally. Doc explained to me Kraepelin's

classification of the psychoses, muttering, as he absentmindedly fondled my wrist, that in a year or two he'd be a good illustration of Korsakov's Syndrome.

They've all been pretty darn good to me in their kooky ways, the actors have. Not one of them has tried to take advantage of my situation to extort anything out of me, beyond asking me to sew on a button or polish some boots or at worst clean the wash bowl. Not one of the boys has made a pass I didn't at least seem to invite. And when my crush on Sid was at its worst he shouldered me off by getting polite — something he only is to strangers. On the rebound I hit Beau, who treated me like a real Southern gentleman.

All this for a stupid little waif, whom anyone but a gang of sentimental actors would have sent to Bellevue without a second thought or feeling. For, to get disgustingly realistic, my most plausible theory of me is that I'm a stage-struck girl from Iowa who saw her twenties slipping away and her sanity too, and made the dash to Greenwich Village, and went so ape on Shakespeare after seeing her first performance in Central Park that she kept going back there night after night (Christopher Street, Penn Station, Times

Square, Columbus Circle — see?) and hung around the stage door, so mousy but open-mouthed that the actors made a pet of her.

And then something very nasty happened to her, either down at the Village or in a dark corner of the Park. Something so nasty that it blew the top of her head right off. And she ran to the only people and place where she felt she could ever again feel safe. And she showed them the top of her head with its singed hair and its jagged ring of skull and they took pity.

My least plausible theory of me, but the one I like the most, is that I was born in the dressing room, cradled in the top of a flat theatrical trunk with my ears full of Shakespeare's lines before I ever said "Mama," let alone lamped a TV; hush-walked when I cried by whoever was off stage, old props my first toys, trying to eat crepe hair my first indiscretion, sticks of greasepaint my first crayons. You know, I really wouldn't be bothered by crazy fears about New York changing and the dressing room shifting around in space and time, if I could be sure I'd always be able to stay in it and that the same sweet guys and gals would always be with me and that the shows would always go on.

This show was sure going on, it suddenly hit me, for I'd let my fingers slip off my ears as I sentimentalized and wish-dreamed and I heard, muted by the length and stuff of the dressing room, the slow beat of a drum and then a drum note in Maudie's voice taking up that beat as she warned the other two witches, "A drum, a drum! Macbeth doth come."

Why, I'd not only missed Sid's history - making - and - breaking Queen Elizabeth prologue (kicking myself that I had, now it was over), I'd also missed the short witch scene with its famous "Fair is foul and foul is fair," the Bloody Sergeant scene where Duncan hears about Macbeth's victory, and we were well into the second witch scene, the one on the blasted heath where Macbeth gets it predicted to him he'll be king after Duncan and is tempted to speculate about hurrying up the process.

I sat up. I did hesitate a minute then, my fingers going back toward my ears, because *Macbeth* is specially tense-making and when I've had one of my mind-wavery fits I feel weak for a while and things are blurry and uncertain. Maybe I'd better take a couple of the barbiturate sleeping pills Maudie manages to get for me and—but *No, Greta*, I told myself, you want

to watch this show, you want to see how they do in those crazy costumes. You especially want to see how Martin makes out. He'd never forgive you if you didn't.

So I walked to the other end of the empty dressing room, moving quite slowly and touching the edges here and there, the words of the play getting louder all the time. By the time I got to the door Bruce-Banquo was saying to the witches, "If you can look into the seeds of time, And say which grain will grow and which will not,"—those lines that stir anyone's imagination with their veiled vision of the universe.

The overall lighting was a little dim (afternoon fading already?—a late matinee?) and the stage lights flickery and the scenery still a little spectral-flimsy. Oh, my mind-wavery fits can be lulus! But I concentrated on the actors, watching them through the entrance-gaps in the wings. They were solid enough.

Giving a solid performance, too, as I decided after watching that scene through and the one after it where Duncan congratulates Macbeth, with never a pause between the two scenes in true Elizabethan style. Nobody was laughing at the colorful costumes. After a while I began to accept them myself.

Oh, it was a different *Macbeth* than our company usually does. Louder and faster, with shorter pauses between speeches, the blank verse at times approaching a chant. But it had a lot of real guts and everybody was just throwing themselves into it, Sid especially.

The first Lady Macbeth scene came. Without exactly realizing it I moved forward to where I'd been when I got my three shocks. Martin is so intent on his career and making good that he has me the same way about it.

The Thaness started off, as she always does, toward the opposite side of the stage and facing a little away from me. Then she moved a step and looked down at the stage-parchment letter in her hands and began to read it, though there was nothing on it but scribble, and my heart sank because the voice I heard was Miss Nefer's. I thought (and almost said out loud) *Oh, dammit, he tunked out, or Sid decided at the last minute he couldn't trust him with the part. Whoever got Miss Nefer out of the ice cream cone in time?*

Then she swung around and I saw that no, my God, it was Martin, no mistaking. He'd been using her voice. When a person first does a part, especially get-

ting up in it without much rehearsing, he's bound to copy the actor he's been hearing doing it. And as I listened on, I realized it was fundamentally Martin's own voice pitched a trifle high, only some of the intonations and rhythms were Miss Nefer's. He was showing a lot of feeling and intensity too and real Martin-type poise. *You're off to a great start, kid*, I cheered inwardly. *Keep it up!*

Just then I looked toward the audience. Once again I almost squeaked out loud. For out there, close to the stage, in the very middle of the reserve section, was a carpet spread out. And sitting in the middle of it on some sort of little chair, with what looked like two charcoal braziers smoking to either side of her, was Miss Nefer with a string of extras in Elizabethan hats with cloaks pulled around them.

For a second it really threw me because it reminded me of the things I'd seen or thought I'd seen the couple of times I'd sneaked a peek through the curtain-hole at the audience in the indoor auditorium.

It hardly threw me for more than a second, though, because I remembered that the characters who speak Shakespeare's prologues often stay on stage and sometimes kind of join the au-

dience and even comment on the play from time to time — Christopher Sly and attendant lords in *The Shrew*, for one. Sid had just copied and in his usual style laid it on thick.

Well, bully for you, Sid, I thought, I'm sure the witless New York groundlings will be thrilled to their cold little toes knowing they're sitting in the same audience as Good Queen Liz and attendant courtiers. And as for you, Miss Nefer, I added a shade invidiously, you just keep on sitting cold in Central Park, warmed by dry-ice smoke from braziers, and keep your mouth shut and everything'll be fine. I'm sincerely glad you'll be able to be Queen Elizabeth all night long. Just so long as you don't try to steal the scene from Martin and the rest of the cast, and the real play.

I suppose that camp chair will get a little uncomfortable by the time the Fifth Act comes tramping along to that drumbeat, but I'm sure you're so much in character you'll never feel it.

One thing though: just don't scare me again pretending to work witchcraft — with a virginals or any other way.

Okay?

Swell.

Me, now, I'm going to watch the play.

IV

...to dream of new dimensions,
Cheating checkmate
by painting the king's robe
So that he slides like a queen;

— Graves

I swung back to the play just at the moment Lady Mack soliloquizes, "Come to my woman's breasts. And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers." Although I knew it was just folded towel Martin was touching with his fingertips as he lifted them to the top half of his green bodice, I got carried away, he made it so real. I decided boys can play girls better than people think. Maybe they should do it a little more often, and girls play boys too.

Then Sid-Macbeth came back to his wife from the wars, looking triumphant but scared because the murder-idea's started to smoulder in him, and she got busy fanning the blaze like any other good little *hausfrau* intent on her husband rising in the company and knowing that she's the power behind him and that when there are promotions someone's always got to get the axe. Sid and Martin made this charming little domestic scene so natural yet gutsy too that I

wanted to shout hooray. Even Sid clutching Martin to that ridiculous pot-chested cuirass didn't have one note of horseplay in it. Their bodies spoke. It was the McCoy.

After that, the play began to get real good, the fast tempo and exaggerated facial expressions actually helping it. By the time the Dagger Scene came along I was digging my fingernails into my sweaty palms. Which was a good thing — my eating up the play, I mean — because it kept me from looking at the audience again, even taking a fast peek. As you've gathered, audiences bug me. All those people out there in the shadows, watching the actors in the light, all those silent voyeurs as Bruce calls them. Why, they might be anything. And sometimes (to my mind-wavary sorrow) I think they are. Maybe crouching in the dark out there, hiding among the others, is the one who did the nasty thing to me that tore off the top of my head.

Anyhow, if I so much as glance at the audience, I begin to get ideas about it — and sometimes even if I don't, as just at this moment I thought I heard horses restlessly pawing hard ground and one whinny, though that was shut off fast. *Krishna* *kressed us!* I thought, *Skiddy*

can't have hired horses for Nefer-Elizabeth much as he's a circus man at heart. We don't have that kind of money. Besides—

But just then Sid-Macbeth gasped as if he were sucking in a bucket of air. He'd shed the cuirass, fortunately. He said, "Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?" and the play hooked me again, and I had no time to think about or listen for anything else. Most of the offstage actors were on the other side of the stage, as that's where they make their exists and entrances at this point in the Second Act. I stood alone in the wings, watching the play like a bug, frightened only of the horrors Shakespeare had in mind when he wrote it.

Yes, the play was going great. The Dagger Scene was terrific where Duncan gets murdered offstage, and so was the part afterwards where hysteria mounts as the crime's discovered.

But just at this point I began to catch notes I didn't like. Twice someone was late on entrance and came on as if shot from a cannon. And three times at least Sid had to throw someone a line when they blew up — in the clutches Sid's better than any prompt book. It began to look as if the play were getting out of control, maybe because the new tempo was so hot.

But they got through the Murder Scene okay. As they came trooping off, yelling "Well contented," most of them on my side for a change, I went for Sid with a towel. He always sweats like a pig in the Murder Scene. I mopped his neck and shoved the towel up under his doublet to catch the dripping armpits.

Meanwhile he was fumbling around on a narrow table where they lay props and costumes for quick changes. Suddenly he dug his fingers into my shoulder, enough to catch my attention at this point, meaning I'd show bruises tomorrow, and yelled at me under his breath, "And you love me, our crows and robes. Presto!"

I was off like a flash to the costumery. There were Mr. and Mrs. Mack's king-and-queen robes and stuff hanging and sitting just where I knew they'd have to be.

I snatched them up, thinking, *Boy, they made a mistake when they didn't tell about this special performance*, and I started back like Flash Two.

As I shot out the dressing room door the theater was very quiet. There's a short low-pitched scene on stage then, to give the audience a breather. I heard Miss Nefer say loudly (it had to be loud to get to me from even

the front of the audience): " 'Tis a good bloody play, Eyes," and some voice I didn't recognize replied a bit grudgingly, "There's meat in it and some poetry too, though rough-wrought." She went on, still as loudly as if she owned the theater, " 'Twill make Master Kyd bite his nails with jealousy—ha, ha!"

Ha-ha yourself, you scene-stealing witch, I thought, as I helped Sid and then Martin on with their royal outer duds. But at the same time I knew Sid must have written those lines himself to go along with his prologue. They had the unmistakable rough-wrought Lessingham touch. Did he really expect the audience to make anything of that reference to Shakespeare's predecessor Thomas Kyd of *The Spanish Tragedy* and the lost *Hamlet*? And if they knew enough to spot that, wouldn't they be bound to realize the whole Elizabeth-Macbeth tie-up was anachronistic? But when Sid gets an inspiration he can be very bull-headed.

Just then, while Bruce-Banquo was speaking his broody low soliloquy on stage, Miss Nefer cut in again loudly with, "Aye, Eyes, a good bloody play. Yet somehow, methinks—I know not how—I've heard it before." Whereupon Sid grabbed Martin by the wrist and hissed, "Did'st

hear? Oh, I like not that," and I thought, *Oh-ho, so now she's beginning to ad-lib*.

Well, right away they all went on stage with a flourish, Sid and Martin crowned and hand in hand. The play got going strong again. But there were still those edge-of-control undercurrents and I began to be more uneasy than caught up, and I had to stare consciously at the actors to keep off a wavery-fit.

Other things began to bother me too, such as all the doubling.

Macbeth's a great play for doubling. For instance, anyone except Macbeth or Banquo can double one of the Three Witches—or one of the Three Murderers for that matter. Normally we double at least one or two of the Witches and Murderers, but this performance there'd been more multiple-parting than I'd ever seen. Doc had whipped off his Duncan beard and thrown on a brown smock and hood to play the Porter with his normal bottle-roughened accents. Well, a drunk impersonating a drunk, pretty appropriate. But Bruce was doing the next-door-to-impossible double of Banquo and Macduff, using a ringing tenor voice for the latter and wearing in the murder scene a helmet with dropped visor to hid his

Banquo beard. He'd be able to tear it off, of course, after the Murderers got Banquo and he'd made his brief appearance as a bloodied-up ghost in the Banquet Scene. I asked myself, *My God, has Sidney got all the other actors out in front playing courtiers to Elizabeth-Nefer? Wasting them that way? The whore-son rogue's gone nuts!*

But really it was plain frightening, all that frantic doubling and tripling with its suggestion that the play (and the company too, Freya forfend) was becoming a rickety patchwork illusion with everybody racing around faster and faster to hide the holes. And the scenery-wavery stuff and the warped Park-sounds were scary too. I was actually shivering by the time Sid got to: "Light thickens; and the crow Makes wing to the rooky wood: Good things of day begin to droop and drowse; While night's black agents to their preys do rouse." Those graveyard lines didn't help my nerves any, of course. Nor did thinking I heard Nefer-Elizabeth say from the audience, rather softly for her this time, "Eyes, I have heard that speech, I know not where. Think you 'tiz stolen?"

Greta, I told myself, *you need a Milton before the crow makes wing through your kooky head*.

I turned to go and fetch me

one from my closet. And stopped dead.

Just behind me, pacing back and forth like an ash-colored tiger in the gloomy wings, looking daggers at the audience every time she turned at that end of her invisible cage, but ignoring me completely, was Miss Nefer in the Elizabeth wig and rig.

Well, I suppose I should have said to myself, *Greta, you imagined that last loud whisper from the audience. Miss Nefer's simply unknicked herself, waved a hand to the real audience and come back stage. Maybe Sid just had her out there for the first half of the play. Or maybe she just couldn't stand watching Martin give such a bang-up performance in her part of Lady Mack.*

Yes, maybe I should have told myself something like that, but somehow all I could think then — and I thought it with a steady mounting shiver — was, *We got two Elizabeths. This one is our witch Nefer. I know. I dressed her. And I know that devil-look from the virginals. But if this is our Elizabeth, the company Elizabeth, the stage Elizabeth ... who's the other?*

And because I didn't dare to let myself think of the answer to that question, I dodged around the invisible cage that

the ash-colored skirt seemed to ripple against as the Tiger Queen turned and I ran into the dressing room, my only thought to get behind my New York City Screen.

V

Even little things are turning out to be great things and becoming intensely interesting. Have you ever thought about the properties of numbers?

— The Maiden

Lying on my cot, my eyes crosswise to the printing, I looked from a pink Algonquin menu to a pale green New Amsterdam program, with a tiny doll of Father Knickerbocker dangling between them on a yellow thread. Really they weren't covering up much of anything. A ghostly hole an inch and a half across seemed to char itself in the program. As if my eye were right up against it, I saw in vivid memory what I'd seen the two times I'd dared a peek through the hole in the curtain: a bevy of ladies in masks and Nell Gwyn dresses and men in King Charles knee-breeches and long curled hair, and the second time a bunch of people and creatures just wild: all sorts and

colors of clothes, humans with hoofs for feet and antennae springing from their foreheads, furry and feathery things that had more arms than two and in one case that many heads — as if they were dressed up in our *Tempest*, *Peer Gynt* and *Insect People* costumes and some more besides.

Naturally I'd had mind-wavery fits both times. Afterwards Sid had wagged a finger at me and explained that on those two nights we'd been giving performances for people who'd arranged a costume theater-party and been going to attend a masquerade ball, and 'zounds, when would I learn to guard my half-patched pate?

I don't know, I guess never, I answered now, quick looking at a Giants pennant, a Korvette ad, a map of Central Park, my Willy Mays baseball and a Radio City tour ticket. That was eight items I'd looked at this trip without feeling any inward improvement. They weren't reassuring me at all.

The blue fly came slowly buzzing down over my screen and I asked it, "What are you looking for? A spider?" when what should I hear coming back through the dressing room straight toward my sleeping closet but Miss Nefer's footsteps. No one else walks that way.

She's going to do something to you, Greta, I thought. She's the maniac in the company. She's the one who terrorized you with the boning knife in the shrubbery, or sicked the giant tarantula on you at the dark end of the subway platform, or whatever it was, and the others are covering up for. She's going to smile the devil-smile and weave those white twig-fingers at you, all eight of them. And Birnam Wood'll come to Dunsinane and you'll be burnt at the stake by men in armor or drawn and quartered by eight-legged monkeys that talk or torn apart by wild centaurs or whirled through the roof to the moon without being dressed for it or sent burrowing into the past to stifle in Iowa 1948 or Egypt 4,008 B.C. The screen won't keep her out.

Then a head of hair pushed over the screen. But it was black-bound-with-silver, Brahma bless us, and a moment later Martin was giving me one of his rare smiles.

I said, "Marty, do something for me. Don't ever use Miss Nefer's footsteps again. Her voice, okay, if you have to. But not the footsteps. Don't ask me why, just don't."

Martin came around and sat on the foot of my cot. My legs were already doubled up. He straight-



ened out his blue-and-gold skirt and rested a hand on my black sneakers.

"Feeling a little wonky, Greta?" he asked. "Don't worry about me. Banquo's dead and so's his ghost. We've finished the Banquet Scene. I've got lots of time."

I just looked at him, queerly I guess. Then without lifting my head I asked him, "Martin, tell me the truth. Does the dressing room move around?"

I was talking so low that he hitched a little closer, not touching me anywhere else though.

"The Earth's whipping around the sun at 20 miles a second," he replied, "and the dressing room

goes with it."

I shook my head, my cheek scrubbing the pillow, "I mean ... shifting," I said. "By itself." "How?" he asked.

"Well," I told him, "I've had this idea—it's just a sort of fancy, remember—that if you wanted to time-travel and, well, do things, you could hardly pick a more practical machine than a dressing room and sort of stage and half-theater attached, with actors to man it. Actors can fit in anywhere. They're used to learning new parts and wearing strange costumes. Heck, they're even used to traveling a lot. And if an actor's a bit strange nobody thinks anything of it—



he's almost expected to be foreign, it's an asset to him."

"And a theater, well, a theater can spring up almost anywhere and nobody ask questions, except the zoning authorities and such and they can always be squared. Theaters come and go. It happens all the time. They're transitory. Yet theaters are crossroads, anonymous meeting places, anybody with a few bucks or sometimes nothing at all can go. And theaters attract important people, the sort of people you might want to do something to. Caesar was stabbed in a theater. Lincoln was shot in one. And..."

My voice trailed off. "A cute

idea," he commented.

I reached down to his hand on my shoe and took hold of his middle finger as a baby might.

"Yeah," I said, "But Martin, is it true?"

He asked me gravely, "What do you think?"

I didn't say anything.

"How would you like to work in a company like that?" he asked speculatively.

"I don't really know," I said.

He sat up straighter and his voice got brisk. "Well, all fantasy aside, how'd you like to work in this company?" He asked, lightly slapping my ankle. "On the stage, I mean. Sid thinks

you're ready for some of the smaller parts. In fact, he asked me to put it to you. He thinks you never take him seriously."

"Pardon me while I gasp and glow," I said. Then, "Oh Marty, I can't really imagine myself doing the tiniest part."

"Me neither, eight months ago," he said. "Now, look. Lady Macbeth."

"But Marty," I said, reaching for his finger again, "you haven't answered my question. About whether it's true."

"Oh that!" he said with a laugh, switching his hand to the other side. "Ask me something else."

"Okay," I said, "why am I bugged on the number eight? Because I'm permanently behind a private 8-ball?"

"Eight's a number with many properties," he said, suddenly as intently serious as he usually is. "The corners of a cube."

"You mean I'm a square?" I said. "Or just a brick? You know, 'She's a brick.'"

"But eight's most curious property," he continued with a frown, "is that lying on its side it signifies infinity. So eight erect is really —" and suddenly his made-up, naturally solemn face got a great glow of inspiration and devotion — "Infinity Arisen!"

Well, I don't know. You meet

quite a few people in the theater who are bats on numerology, they use it to pick stage-names. But I'd never have guessed it of Martin. He always struck me as the skeptical, cynical type.

"I had another idea about eight," I said hesitatingly. "Spiders. That 8-legged asterisk on Miss Nefer's forehead —" I suppressed a shudder.

"You don't like her, do you?" he stated.

"I'm afraid of her," I said.

"You shouldn't be. She's a very great woman and tonight she's playing an infinitely more difficult part than I am. No, Greta," he went on as I started to protest, "believe me, you don't understand anything about it at this moment. Just as you don't understand about spiders, fearing them. They're the first to climb the rigging and to climb ashore too. They're the web-weavers, the line-throwers, the connectors, Siva and Kali united in love. They're the double mandala, the beginning and the end, infinity mustered and on the march—"

"They're also on my New York screen!" I squeaked, shrinking back across the cot a little and pointing at a tiny glinting silver-and-black thing mounting below my Willy-ball.

Martin gently caught its line on his finger and lifted it very

close to his face. "Eight eyes too," he told me. Then, "Poor little god," he said and put it back.

"Marty? Marty?" Sid's desperate stage-whisper rasped the length of the dressing room.

Martin stood up. "Yes, Sid?"

Sid's voice stayed a whisper but went from desperate to ferocious. "You villainous elf-skin! Know you not the Cauldron Scene's been playing a hundred heartbeats? 'Tis 'most my entrance and we still mustering only two witches out of three! Oh, you nodd-pated starveling!"

Before Sid had got much more than half of that out, Martin had slipped around the screen, raced the length of the dressing room, and I'd heard a lusty thwack as he went out the door. I couldn't help grinning, though with Martin racked by anxieties and reliefs over his first time as Lady Mack, it was easy to understand it slipping his mind that he was still doubling Second Witch.

VI

I will vault credit
and affect high pleasures
Beyond death.

— Ferdinand

I sat down where Martin had been, first pushing the screen far enough to the side for

me to see the length of the dressing room and notice anyone coming through the door and any blurs moving behind the thin white curtain shutting off the boys' two-thirds.

I'd been going to think. But instead I just sat there, experiencing my body and the room around it, steadying myself or maybe readying myself. I couldn't tell which, but it was nothing to think about, only to feel. My heartbeat became a very faint, slow, solid throb. My spine straightened.

No one came in or went out. Distantly I heard Macbeth and the witches and the apparitions talk.

Once I looked at the New York Screen, but all the stuff there had grown stale. No protection, no nothing.

I reached down to my suitcase and from where I'd been going to get a miltown I took a dexedrine and popped it in my mouth. Then I started out, beginning to shake.

When I got to the end of the curtain I went around it to Sid's dressing table and asked Shakespeare, "Am I doing the right thing, Pop?" But he didn't answer me out of his portrait. He just looked sneaky-innocent, like he knew a lot but wouldn't tell, and I found myself think of a little silver-framed photo Sid

had used to keep there too of a cocky German-looking young actor with "Erich" autographed across it in white ink. At least I supposed he was an actor. He looked a little like Erich von Stroheim, but nicer yet somehow nastier too. The photo had used to upset me, I don't know why. Sid must have noticed it, for one day it was gone.

I thought of the tiny black-and-silver spider crawling across the remembered silver frame, and for some reason it gave me the cold creeps.

Well, this wasn't doing me any good, just making me feel dismal again, so I quick went out. In the door I had to slip around the actors coming back from the Cauldron Scene and the big bolt nicked my hip.

Outside Maud was peeling off her Third Witch stuff to reveal Lady Macduff beneath. She twitched me a grin.

"How's it going?" I asked.

"Okay, I guess," she shrugged. "What an audience! Noisy as highschool kids."

"How come Sid didn't have a boy do your part?" I asked.

"He goofed, I guess. But I've batted down my bosoms and playing Mrs. Macduff as a boy."

"How does a girl do that in a dress?" I asked.

"She sits stiff and thinks pants," she said, handing me her

witch robe. "'Scuse me now. I got to find my children and go get murdered."

I'd moved a few steps nearer the stage when I felt the gentlest tug at my hip. I looked down and saw that a taut black thread from the bottom of my sweater connected me with the dressing room. It must have snagged on the big bolt and unraveled. I moved my body an inch or so, tugging it delicately to see what it felt like and I got the answers: Theseus's clew, a spider's line, an umbilicus.

I reached down close to my side and snapped it with my fingernails. The black thread leaped away. But the dressing room door didn't vanish, or the wings change, or the world end, and I didn't fall down.

After that I just stood there for quite a while, feeling my new freedom and steadiness, letting my body get used to it. I didn't do any thinking. I hardly bothered to study anything around me, though I did notice that there were more bushes and trees than set pieces, and that the flickery lightning was simply torches and that Queen Elizabeth was in (or back in) the audience. Sometimes letting your body get used to something is all you should do, or maybe can do.

And I did smell horse dung.

When the Lady Macduff Scene was over and the Chicken Scene well begun, I went back to the dressing room. Actors call it the Chicken Scene because Macduff weeps in it about "all my pretty chickens and their dam," meaning his kids and wife, being murdered "at one fell swoop" on orders of that chickenyard-raiding "hell-kite" Macbeth.

Inside the dressing room I steered down the boys' side. Doc was putting on an improbable-looking dark makeup for Macbeth's last faithful servant Seyton. He didn't seem as boozy-woozy as usual for Fourth Act, but just the same I stopped to help him get into a chain-mail shirt made of thick cord woven and silvered.

In the third chair beyond, Sid was sitting back with his corset loosened and critically surveying Martin, who'd now changed to a white wool nightgown that clung and draped beautifully, but not particularly enticingly, on him and his folded towel, which had slipped a bit.

From beside Sid's mirror, Shakespeare smiled out of his portrait at them like an intelligent big-headed bug.

Martin stood tall, spread his arms rather like a high priest, and intoned, "*Amici! Romanil Populares!*"

I nudged Doc. "What goes on now?" I whispered.

He turned a bleary eye on them. "I think they are rehearsing *Julius Caesar* in Latin." He shrugged. "It begins the oration of Antony."

"But why?" I asked. Sid does like to put every moment to use when the performance-fire is in people, but this project seemed pretty far afield — hyper-pedantic. Yet at the same time I felt my scalp shivering as if my mind were jumping with speculations just below the surface.

Doc shook his head and shrugged again.

Sid shoved a palm at Martin and roared softly, "'Sdeath, boy, thou'rt not playing a Roman statua but a Roman! Loosen your knees and try again."

Then he saw me. Signing Martin to stop, he called, "Come hither, sweeting." I obeyed quickly. He gave me a fiendish grin and said, "Thou'st heard our proposal from Martin. What sayest thou, wench?"

This time the shiver was in my back. It felt good. I realized I was grinning back at him, and I knew what I'd been getting ready for the last twenty minutes.

"I'm on," I said. "Count me in the company."

Sid jumped up and grabbed

me by the shoulders and hair and bussed me on both cheeks. It was a little like being bombed.

"Prodigious!" he cried. "Thou'lt play the Gentlewoman in the Sleepwalking Scene tonight. Martin, her costume! Now sweet wench, mark me well." His voice grew grave and old. "When was it she last walked?"

The new courage went out of me like water down a chute. "But Sidy, I can't start *tonight*," I protested, half pleading, half outraged.

"Tonight or never! 'Tis an emergency—we're short-handed." Again his voice changed. "When was it she last walked?"

"But Sidy, I don't know the part."

"You must. You've heard the play twenty times this year past. When was it she last walked?"

Martin was back and yanking down a blonde wig on my head and shoving my arms into a light gray robe.

"I've never studied *the lines*," I squeaked at Sidney.

"Liar! I've watched your lips move a dozen nights when you watched the scene from the wings. Close your eyes, girl! Martin, unhand her. Close your eyes, girl, empty your mind, and listen, listen only. When was it she last walked?"

In the blackness I heard my-

self replying to that cue, first in a whisper, then more loudly, then full-throated but grave, "Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth—"

"Bravissimo! Sidy cried and bombed me again. Martin hugged his arm around my shoulders too, then quickly stooped to start hooking up my robe from the bottom.

"But that's only the first lines, Sidy," I protested.

"They're enough!"

"But Sidy, what if I blow up?" I asked.

"Keep your mind empty. You won't. Further, I'll be at your side, doubling the Doctor, to prompt you if you pause."

That ought to take care of two of me, I thought. Then something else struck me. "But Sidy," I quavered, "how do I play the Gentlewoman as a boy?"

"Boy?" he demanded wonderingly. "Play her without falling down flat on your face and I'll be past measure happy!" And he smacked me hard on the fanny.

Martin's fingers were darting at the next to the last hook. I stopped him and shoved my hand down the neck of my sweater and got hold of the sub-way token and the chain it was

on and yanked. It burned my neck but the gold links parted. I started to throw it across the room, but instead I smiled at Sidy and dropped it in his palm.

"The Sleepwalking Scene!" Maud hissed insistently to us from the door.

VII

I know death hath
ten thousand several doors
For men to take their exits,
and 'tis found
They go on such strange
geometrical hinges,
You may open them both
ways.

— The Duchess

There is this about an actor on stage: he can see the audience but he can't look at them, unless he's a narrator or some sort of comic. I wasn't the first (Grendel groks!) and only scared to death of becoming the second as Sidy walked me out of the wings onto the stage, over the groundcloth that felt so much like ground, with a sort of interweaving policeman-grip on my left arm.

Sid was in a dark gray robe looking like some dismal kind of monk, his head so hooded for the Doctor that you couldn't see his face at all.

My skull was pulse-buzzing. My throat was squeezed dry. My heart was pounding. Below that my body was empty, squirmy, electricity-stung, yet with the feeling of wearing ice cold iron pants.

I heard as if from two million miles, "When was it she last walked?" and then an iron bell somewhere tolling the the reply — I guess it had to be my voice coming up through my body from my iron pants: "Since his majesty went into the field—" and so on, until Martin had come on stage, stary-eyed, a white scarf tossed over the back of his long black wig and a flaring candle two inches thick gripped in his right hand and dripping wax on his wrist, and started to do Lady Mack's sleepwalking half-hinted confessions of the murders of Duncan and Banquo and Lady Macduff.

So here is what I saw then without looking, like a vivid scene that floats out in front of your mind in a reverie, hovering against a background of dark blur, and sort of flashes on and off as you think, or in my case act. All the time, remember, with Sid's hand hard on my wrist and me now and then tolling Shakespearean language out of some lightless storehouse of memory I'd never known was there to belong to me.

There was a medium-size glade in a forest. Through the half-naked black branches shone a dark cold sky, like ashes of silver, early evening.

The glade had two horns, as it were, narrowing back to either side and going off through the forest. A chilly breeze was blowing out of them, almost enough to put out the candle. Its flame rippled.

Farther far back in the horn to my left, but not very far, were clumped two dozen or so men in dark cloaks they huddled around themselves. They wore brimmed tallish hats and pale stuff showing at their necks. Somehow I assumed that these men must be the "rude fellows from the City" I remembered Beau mentioning a million or so years ago. Although I couldn't see them very well, and didn't spend much time on them, there was one of them who had his hat off or excitedly pushed way back, showing a big pale forehead. Although that was all the conscious impression I had of his face, he seemed frighteningly familiar.

In the horn to my right, which was wider, were lined up about a dozen horses, with grooms holding tight every two of them, but throwing their heads back now and then as they strained against the reins, and stamping

their front hooves restlessly. Oh, they frightened me, I tell you, that line of two-foot-long glossy-haired faces, writhing back their upper lips from teeth wide as piano keys, every horse of them looking as wild-eyed and evil as Fuseli's steed sticking its head through the drapes in his picture "The Nightmare."

To the center the trees came close to the stage. Just in front of them was Queen Elizabeth sitting on the chair on the spread carpet, just as I'd seen her out there before; only now I could see that the braziers were glowing and redly high-lighting her pale cheeks and dark red hair and the silver in her dress and cloak. She was looking at Martin — Lady Mack — most intently, her mouth grimaced tight, twisting her fingers together.

Standing rather close around her were a half dozen men with fancier hats and ruffs and wide-flaring riding gauntlets.

Then, through the trees and tall leafless bushes just behind Elizabeth, I saw an identical Elizabeth-face floating, only this one was smiling a demonic smile. The eyes were open very wide. Now and then the pupils darted rapid glances from side to side.

There was a sharp pain in my left wrist and Sid whispering at me, "Accustomed ac-

tion!" out of the corner of his shadowed mouth.

I tolled on obediently, "It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour."

Martin had set down the candle, which still flared and guttered, on a little high table so firm its thin legs must have been stabbed into the ground. And he was rubbing his hands together slowly, continually, tormentedly, trying to get rid of Duncan's blood which Mrs. Mack knows in her sleep is still there. And all the while as he did it, the agitation of the seated Elizabeth grew, the eyes flicking from side to side, hands writhing.

He got to the lines, "Here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!"

As he wrung out those soft, tortured sighs, Elizabeth stood up from her chair and took a step forward. The courtiers moved toward her quickly, but not touching her, and she said loudly, "Tis the blood of Mary Stuart whereof she speaks — the pails of blood that will gush from her chopped neck. Oh, I cannot endure it!" And as she said that last, she suddenly turned about and strode back toward the trees, kicking out her ash-

colored skirt. One of the courtiers turned with her and stooped toward her closely, whispering something. But although she paused a moment, all she said was, "Nay, Eyes, stop not the play, but follow me not! Nay, I say leave me, Leicester!" And she walked into the trees, he looking after her.

Then Sid was kicking my ankle and I was reciting something and Martin was taking up his candle again without looking at it saying with a drugged agitation, "To bed; to bed; there's knocking at the gate."

Elizabeth came walking out of the trees again, her head bowed. She couldn't have been in them ten seconds. Leicester hurried toward her, hand anxiously outstretched.

Martin moved offstage, torturedly yet softly wailing, "What's done cannot be undone."

Just then Elizabeth flicked aside Leicester's hand with playful contempt and looked up and she was smiling the devil-smile. A horse whinnied like a trumpeted snicker.

As Sid and I started our last few lines together I intoned mechanically, letting words free-fall from my mind to my tongue. All this time I had been answering Lady Mack in my thoughts, *That's what you think, sister.*

God cannot effect that anything which is past should not have been.

It is more impossible than rising the dead.

— Summa Theologica

The moment I was out of sight of the audience I broke away from Sid and ran to the dressing room. I flopped down on the first chair I saw, my head and arms trailed over its back, and I almost passed out. It wasn't a mind-wavary fit. Just normal faint.

I couldn't have been there long—well, not very long, though the battle-rattle and alarms of the last scene were echoing tinnily from the stage—when Bruce and Beau and Mark (who was playing Malcolm, Martin's usual main part) came in wearing their last-act stage-armor and carrying between them Queen Elizabeth flaccid as a sack. Martin came after them, stripping off his white wool nightgown so fast that buttons flew. I thought automatically, *I'll have to sew those.*

They laid her down on three chairs set side by side and hurried out. Unpinning the folded towel, which had fallen around his waist, Martin walked over and looked down at her. He

yanked off his wig by a braid and tossed it at me.

I let it hit me and fall on the floor. I was looking at that white queenly face, eyes open and staring sightless at the ceiling, mouth open a little too with a thread of foam trailing from the corner, and at that ice-cream-cone bodice that never stirred. The blue fly came buzzing over my head and circled down toward her face.

"Martin," I said with diffculty, "I don't think I'm going to like what we're doing."

He turned on me, his short hair elfed, his fists planted high on his hips at the edge of his black tights, which now were all his clothes.

"You knew!" he said impatiently. "You knew you were signing up for more than acting when you said, 'Count me in the company.'"

Like a legged sapphire the blue fly walked across her upper lip and stopped by the thread of foam.

"But Martin... changing the past... dipping back and killing the real queen... replacing her with a double—"

His dark brows shot up. "The real—You think this is the real Queen Elizabeth?" He grabbed a bottle of rubbing alcohol from the nearest table, gushed some on a towel stained with grease-

paint and, holding the dead head by its red hair (no, wig—the real one wore a wig too) scrubbed the forehead.

The white cosmetic came away, showing sallow skin and on it a faint tattoo in the form of an "S" styled like a yin-yang symbol left a little open.

"Snake!" he hissed. "Destroyer! The arch-enemy, the eternal opponent! God knows how many times people like Queen Elizabeth have been dug out of the past, first by Snakes, then by Spiders, and kidnapped or killed and replaced in the course of our war. This is the first big operation I've been on, Greta. But I know that much."

My head began to ache. I asked, "If she's an enemy double, why didn't she know a performance of Macbeth in her lifetime was an anachronism?"

"Foxholed in the past, only trying to hold a position, they get dulled. They turn half zombie. Even the Snakes. Even our people. Besides, she almost did catch on, twice when she spoke to Leicester."

"Martin," I said dully, "if there've been all these replacements, first by them, then by us, what's happened to the real Elizabeth?"

He shrugged. "God knows."

I asked softly, "But does He, Martin? Can He?"

He hugged his shoulders in, as if to contain a shudder. "Look, Greta," he said, "it's the Snakes who are the warpers and destroyers. We're restoring the past. The Spiders are trying to keep things as first created. We only kill when we must."

I shuddered then, for bursting out of my memory came the glittering, knife-flashing, night-shrouded, bloody image of my lover, the Spider soldier-of-change Erich von Hohenwald, dying in the grip of a giant silver spider, or spider-shaped entity large as he, as they rolled in a tangled ball down a flight of rocks in Central Park.

But the memory-burst didn't blow up my mind, as it had done a year ago, no more than snapping the black thread from my sweater had ended the world. I asked Martin, "Is that what the Snakes say?"

"Of course not! They make the same claims we do. But somewhere, Greta, you have to *trust*." He put out the middle finger of his hand.

I didn't take hold of it. He whirled it away, snapping it against his thumb.

"You're still grieving for that carrion there!" he accused me. He jerked down a section of white curtain and whirled it

over the stiffening body. "If you must grieve, grieve for Miss Nefter! Exiled, imprisoned, locked forever in the past, her mind pulsing faintly in the black hole of the dead and gone, yearning for Nirvana yet nursing one lone painful patch of consciousness. And only to hold a fort! Only to make sure Mary Stuart is executed, the Armada licked, and that all the other consequences flow on. The Snakes' Elizabeth let Mary live... and England die... and the Spaniard hold North America to the Great Lakes and New Scandinavia."

Once more he put out his middle finger.

All right, all right," I said, barely touching it. "You've convinced me."

"Great!" he said. "By for now, Greta. I got to help strike the set."

"That's good," I said. He loped out.

I could hear the skirling sword-clashes of the final fight to the death of the two Macks, Duff and Beth. But I only sat there in the empty dressing room pretending to grieve for a devil-smiling snow tiger locked in a time-cage and for a cute sardonic German killed for insubordination that I had reported... but really grieving for a girl who for a year had been a

rootless child of the theater with a whole company of mothers and fathers, afraid of nothing more than subway bogies and Park and Village monsters.

As I sat there pitying myself beside a shrouded queen, a shadow fell across my knees. I saw stealing through the dressing room a young man in worn dark clothes. He couldn't have been more than twenty-three. He was a frail sort of guy with a weak chin and big forehead and eyes that saw everything. I knew at one he was the one who had seemed familiar to me in the knot of City fellows.

He looked at me and I looked from him to the picture sitting on the reserve makeup box by Siddy's mirror. And I began to tremble.

He looked at it too, of course, as fast as I did. And then he began to tremble too, though it was a finer-grained tremor than mine.

The sword-fight had ended seconds back and now I heard the witches faintly wailing, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair—" Sid has them echo that line offstage at the end to give a feeling of prophecy fulfilled.

Then Sid came pounding up. He's the first finished, since the fight ends offstage so Macduff can carry back a red-necked papier-mache head of him and

show it to the audience. Sid stopped dead in the door.

Then the stranger turned around. His shoulders jerked as he saw Sid. He moved toward him just two or three steps at a time, speaking at the same time in breathy little rushes.

Sid stood there and watched him. When the other actors came boiling up behind him, he put his hands on the doorframe to either side so none of them could get past. Their faces peered around him.

And all this while the stranger was saying, "What may this mean? Can such things be? Are all the seeds of time... wetted by some hell-trickle... sprouted at once in their granary? Speak... speak! You played me a play... that I am writing in my secretest heart. Have you disjointed the frame of things... to steal my unborn thoughts? Fair is foul indeed. Is all the world a stage? Speak, I say! Are you not my friend Sidney James Lessingham of King's Lynn... singed by time's fiery wand... sifted over with the ashes of thirty years? Speak, are you not he? Oh, there are more things in heaven and earth... aye, and perchance hell too... Speak, I charge you!"

And with that he put his hands on Sid's shoulders, half to shake him, I think, but half to keep

from falling over. And for the one time I ever saw it, glib old Siddy had nothing to say.

He worked his lips. He opened his mouth twice and twice shut it. Then, with a kind of desperation in his face, he motioned the actors out of the way behind him with one big arm and swung the other around the stranger's narrow shoulders and swept him out of the dressing room, himself following.

The actors came pouring in then, Bruce tossing Macbeth's head to Martin like a football while he tugged off his horned helmet, Mark dumping a stack of shields in the corner, Maudie pausing as she skittered past me to say, "Hi Gret, great you're back," and patting my temple to show what part of me she meant. Beau went straight to Sid's dressing table and set the portrait aside and lifted out Sid's reserve makeup box.

"The lights, Martin!" he called.

Then Sid came back in, slamming and bolting the door behind him and standing for a moment with his back against it, panting.

I rushed to him. Something was boiling up inside me, but before it could get to my brain I opened my mouth and it came out as, "Siddy, you can't fool me, that was no dirty S-or-S. I don't

care how much he shakes and purrs, or shakes a spear, or just plain shakes—Siddy, that was Shakespeare!"

"Aye, girl, I think so," he told me, holding my wrists together. "They can't find dolls to double men like that—or such is my main hope." A big sickly grin came on his face. "Oh, gods," he demanded, "with what words do you talk to a man whose speech you've stolen all your life?"

I asked him, "Sid, were we ever in Central Park?"

He answered, "Once—twelve months back. A one-night stand. They came for Erich. You flipped."

He swung me aside and moved behind Beau. All the lights went out.

Then I saw, dimly at first, the great dull-gleaming jewel, covered with dials and green-glowing windows, that Beau had lifted from Sid's reserve makeup box. The strongest

green glow showed his intent face, still framed by the long glistening locks of the Ross wig, as he kneeled before the thing—Major Maintainer, I remembered it was called.

"When now? Where?" Beau tossed impatiently to Sid over his shoulder.

"The forty-fourth year before our Lord's birth!" Sid answered instantly. "Rome!"

Beau's fingers danced over the dials like a musician's, or a safe-cracker's. The green glow flared and faded flickeringly.

"There's a storm in that vector of the Void."

"Circle it," Sid ordered.

"There are dark mists every way."

"Then pick the likeliest dark path!"

I called through the dark, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair, eh, Siddy?"

"Aye, chick," he answered me. "'Tis all the rule we have!"

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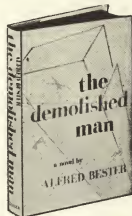
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